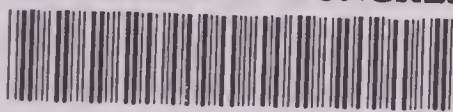


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HERE STAND I!

Hier stehe ich. Ich  
kann nicht anders,  
Gott helfe mir!





# HERE STAND I!

MARTIN NIEMÖLLER

*With Foreword by*  
JAMES MOFFATT

*Translated by*  
JANE LYMBURN



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## FOREWORD

DR. KARL BARTH dedicated a recent book, "To the ministers . . . in memory of all who stood, stand, and will stand." Of the five German ministers named by him, Martin Niemöller, the vicar of Berlin-Dahlem, is one. In his autobiography Niemöller has explained how at the end of the war he passed "from U-boat to pulpit." The present volume will explain why he is to be found among the ministers of the Lutheran Church who are rallying a core of their faithful fellow countrymen against the insidious new paganism which in the name of patriotism is undermining loyalty to the Christian gospel. Dr. Niemöller's sermons are an urgent recall to the "Center," that is, to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ for which and by which vital Christianity stands in any country. It is reassuring to find that he feels no need to repent of having taken part in war. Also, that he does not attack details of the new state worship which is mixed up with Hitlerism. He is content to preach the commanding Word of God with its demands for spiritual faith and freedom in the church and in the individual life, and this he does with a direct, urgent note which rings clear as a bell across the frontiers of Germany. He fought against the Allies during the war, but he will win from many of them in this country a deep sympathy with his efforts to win the greater war against dark powers of worldliness in political and even in ecclesiastical life. He stands for Christianity as the religion which is religion. What he has to say is not new, but it is

always needed, never more so than today, and it is reassuring to hear a Lutheran minister saying it with force and frankness. The publication of this volume is doubly welcome. It will enable Christians in this land to understand more intelligently what inspires the faithful minority in Germany who uphold allegiance to the "Center" of Christianity, and it will also refresh those who are on the outlook for conviction and simplicity in preaching the deep things of God.

JAMES MOFFATT

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,  
NEW YORK



HERE STAND I!



## GRACE

*(New Year's Day, 1933)*

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. — *II Cor. 12:9*



May God be with us in the new year, dear brethren, and may the Lord Jesus Christ comfort us! For we shall have great need of his comfort in the year across whose threshold we have just stepped, this year which lies before us like an unknown country.

What it will bring to us none of us knows. We enter it with that strange, confused mixture of hope and fear, confidence and doubt, which always accompanies uncertainty and ignorance of what is to come: some of us more hopefully, some more skeptically, according to our temperament; some bent down with the burden of care and woe which they must take with them, others strengthened and uplifted by the experiences of the past year. But whatever our attitude we are all stepping into the darkness, and the many good wishes for the new year which we heap upon one another do not really lighten this gloom, for we know that in spite of all these wishes this new year, too, will bring us struggles and cares and sorrows. Thus it has ever been and thus it remains: it is man's lot to struggle and worry and suffer.

And if we feel that things were perhaps not so dark or so difficult in former times, we must just remember that we have to take our years as they come. We must go forward into



them and live through them, and we are not asked whether we will or not, or whether we think we can. So we enter this new year and prepare to take upon ourselves new struggles, new cares and new sorrows. And therefore I repeat, may God be with us and may the Lord Jesus Christ comfort us.

For indeed I know not who else could or should send us a message of comfort at this time save he alone from whom our years take their name. Nor does the world know any other so far; and though it may not believe in his comfort it, too, is forced to reckon its years from him; and so must even those of its inhabitants to whom this comfort means less than nothing and who see in him the real hindrance to a better future.

This day then, by reminding us that nineteen hundred and thirty-three years ago Christ was born, brings God's message to the whole world and offers to everyone who hears that message the comfort of the Lord Jesus Christ. To be sure, many people no longer hear this message from God, and many of those who do hear it do not know what to do with the comfort of Christ the Lord at the beginning of a new year. What, then, is the meaning of this message and what is the use of this comfort? It is a perplexing question, I admit, even for those of us who call ourselves Christians and belong to the community of the Lord.

It is undoubtedly a fact that we Christians must pass through the same darkness as others and that we must fight the same battles and endure the same cares and sorrows as they: sin invades our lives; unemployment does not spare our families; death penetrates into our houses; we groan with the others beneath the terrible misery of our nation. Nay, more: over and above all those tragedies we must help

to bear the guilt of Christendom and the burden of our lack of faith; and how often do we start when we hear the question, sometimes spoken as mockery from without, sometimes as doubt from within: "Where is thy God?" Does it not really seem as though we Christians were the step-children of happiness and the outcasts among the peoples?

We look back at the year which now lies finished behind us. How many buried hopes it holds, how many unanswered prayers! How often did our will power fail; how often, with the best will in the world, did we lack the power to act; and how often were our honest efforts frustrated! Added to that, there was the oppressive and impeding dead weight of responsibility and guilt.

Remembering these things we may well ask anxiously, standing at the threshold of this year of salvation, this year of the Lord which claims to bring us again God's message and Christ's comfort, whether this claim is more than an empty name or whether it is but sound and smoke, signifying nothing.

I believe, dear friends, that we are all familiar with this doubt, and so it is no use trying — even with the aid of a biblical quotation — to console ourselves this morning by saying that the much talked of better days for which our hearts yearn must surely come. God has given us no promise whatever that this new year will be better, kinder and more bearable than the last; and any of us who expect it to be so and draw new hope and new courage from that expectation will soon be discouraged and disappointed when bold and resolute decisions are demanded of us.

What God's intentions may be with regard to our nation or to ourselves in the new year we do not and shall not know.

We must pray that our lot may again be bearable and that our strength may not fail. That is the end for which we must strive and for which we are responsible; but an assurance of success on which we could establish ourselves has not been and will not be given us.

Unfortunately not! And this “unfortunately” is not mere rhetoric; it is called forth by definite and genuine affliction of which we are daily becoming more acutely conscious and which is robbing us of hope and confidence in action. What would we not give for assurance of a better lot — indeed, what is today not actually being offered for it? Countless men and women, driven by lamentable curiosity, are selling their faith in God to soothsayers. But the price they pay is too high, and instead of the desired assurance they buy only a redoubled fear of what is to come, a fear which completely paralyzes every faculty. We must bear the pain of this uncertainty, for God will not take it away, any more than he took away from St. Paul the affliction under which the apostle groaned as from a “thorn in the flesh” and which drove him thrice to prayer. But God gives us the Lord Jesus Christ to comfort us as he gave of old to his apostle, and through Christ he puts an end to our tribulation.

The anxious questions about the future remain unanswered, but we are given a message to which we can cling, a message that puts us, with all our struggles and cares and sorrows, on firm ground and makes the new year, with all that it may bring to us or take from us, a year of the Lord and of salvation: “And he said unto me: My grace is sufficient for thee.”

Grace! The question is whether we can hear this word — hear it in such a way that it means something to us. It



has come to be a dull and insignificant sound in our ears; it has become an auxiliary and complementary word. When we speak of grace we generally mean that God is our great helper in time of trouble, hastening to our aid when we are not sure what to do next, setting right by his forgiveness whatever wrong or wicked thing we have done, and as a lenient judge, showing understanding for the limits of our ability so as to assess the result of our lives positively, in spite of all our failings.

But, dear friends, that is not the grace of God. That is a wicked caricature with which a narrow-minded, individual Christianity allowed itself to be satisfied in happier times and in so doing lost the living God and the living Christ Jesus. Such a Christianity had only an artificial God and an artificial Christ and an artificial grace; it was a piece of self-deception with which, I dare say, it was possible to live comfortably and peacefully for a while, so long as no one and nothing knocked against the house of cards. But since then God has knocked violently against it, and the dream of the gracious God who will preserve earth and heaven and whose sole care is to see that everything runs smoothly — this dream is gone forever. And anyone who is still willing to content himself with this so-called grace and believes that it will strengthen him in his struggle with the future, will lose the ground from under his feet — before he has found a footing. Yet surely when this happens we should not blame the grace of God for our illusions!

No, grace means this: the living God meets us personally in the Lord Jesus Christ — the living *I* meets the living *Thou* — desiring to be our God and Father, to overcome our distrust and conquer our fear of him so that we may turn to



him and give him our whole trust. We generally call this turning and this placing of trust, "repentance" and "faith."

Undoubtedly, the grace of God is to be found only where God comes personally to me so that I am likewise dealing personally with him, and only where God shows me that I must and can put my trust in him. And this grace of God is in the Lord Jesus Christ; it is there today and it is there tomorrow also, as long as Christ is proclaimed among us; and this grace of God is enough and must be enough for us: "My grace is sufficient for thee"!

This grace puts our lives on an entirely new footing. It places us on God's side and makes us certain of his forgiveness and his favor. This does not mean that we are spared struggles or cares or sorrows, or that the uncertainty concerning the future is taken from us; but it does mean that a load falls from us and that we lose the fear caused by the sense of having an intolerable responsibility resting upon us — the fear of having to answer personally for the success or failure of our actions.

The grace of God makes us humble. It reminds us again and again that God stoops to us, that he always takes the first step, that he is for us the omnipresent Giver and Forgiver, and that he is and remains our Lord and Father. But while God's grace puts God's relation to us in order, it also shows us our proper place with regard to God: we are children and servants; we are sinners who live on forgiveness and beggars who live on gifts; God comes to us, we do not go to him. We stand in faith and obedience. His are the grace and the dominion, ours is the trivial daily round, and his the issue.

We all know that beautiful sentence from the letter to the Hebrews: "For it is a good thing that the heart be estab-

lished with grace. . . .” Indeed, if we let ourselves be put where God’s grace puts us, if we “stand in grace,” then nothing can overthrow us. We may be no more than children, but we are children who have a rich and loving Father; we may be only servants, but we are servants who have a kind, strong Master. Yes, we may be beggars who know not today what tomorrow will bring, but our hands are never empty; we may be sinners who are conscious of our guilt and who are daily reminded by fresh guilt that we are sinners, yet we do not forfeit the forgiveness of God, but receive grace for grace from the love and fullness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I ask you, is not that really enough; cannot we be satisfied with that for the new year and for the path upon which we set out today? It is enough; for if we stand in God’s grace we are believing men and women, and as believing men and women we are given the courage and the cheerfulness and the good conscience to begin our work anew. All work, all action, requires a faith. Where there is nothing but pure skepticism or barren doubt, action ceases and what we call life becomes mere existence.

Life and action are possible only when our lives are based on the conviction that our actions have a meaning. We need religion, we need God or an idol, we need faith or a superstition, to be able to live; there remains no third course save flight from life, and that is no longer life.

But every superstition which we hold to brings us to the edge of this abyss: whether we believe in luck or in riches or in efficiency, whether we see the meaning of life in our family or in our profession or in our nation, one single bereavement, one grave reverse, one grievous disappoint-

ment can throw our whole life off balance and paralyze all our energy. The fact is that we are not so strong or so sure of our way as we persuade ourselves; after all, we believe in our idols only with faltering heart and uneasy conscience, and hence our actions are swayed by a mixture of courage and cowardice, confidence and fear, strength and weakness.

But it is otherwise when our lives are based on faith, when we go to our work as men and women who are established in God's grace, who are therefore free from the secret fear that God will leave them in the lurch in moments of crisis, and who are unencumbered by personal responsibility for success or failure.

The grace of God makes us humble. We are not God's generals but his soldiers. Ours is not to make the plans, but to carry out orders — and it is that which makes our lives glad and assured; it is that which gives the men and women who believe in God's grace and find it sufficient the happy carefree spirit which dares to act and is discouraged by no sorrow and by no failure. Therein are all believing Christians — however different they may otherwise be — alike, whether they be called Paul, Augustine or Luther, Wichern, Fliedner or Bodelschwingh, or whether they bear a name which has never reached our ears; for therein is the truth of the saying revealed: "My strength is made perfect in weakness."

The grace of God makes people humble and yet at the same time and for that very reason it makes them strong, for it creates men and women who are unencumbered and who are therefore free to act because their trust is in God.

And what more, I ask you, could we need for the new

year, with all its still unknown tasks, struggles, cares and sorrows, than this energy which is wholly independent of success or failure because it comes from the grace of God?

And so we will take this message with us as a watchword for the new year and learn more and more what it means for our life and work: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." If we cling to that word, this year too — and perhaps this year in particular — will, whatever else it may bring, become a year of the Lord of salvation. May God help us through Christ Jesus to make it so! Yes, may God be with us, and may the Lord Jesus Christ comfort us!

AMEN.



# FIRST INTIMATION OF THE PASSION

*(First Sunday in Lent, 1933)*

From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying: Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? — *Matt. 16:21-26*



As a Christian community we are today conscious of strangely conflicting emotions. We are celebrating the first Sunday of the Passion, and at this quiet time we should like to free ourselves from the many and confusing impressions that rush in upon us from the unsettled present; we should like — just because we are Christians — to be wholly receptive, and with our spiritual eyes and ears to absorb what the Passion of our Lord is meant to show us and to tell us.

However, not only is it more difficult than it perhaps was in former years for us to secure the quiet and concentration necessary for this end, but it almost seems to us as though this year we had no right to it. The fact is that it is simply impossible for us today to accept the comfortable formula

that politics have no place in the church. Such a claim may be permissible as long as the politics are concerned with trivial questions of tactics and methods, expediency and utility, or the little ups and downs in church life — that is, with matters which we nowadays leave to the discretion of our intellects. We can put such things away from us and shed them as one sheds a work garment; and it even does us good to do so and thus to realize that there exist matters and problems before which these paltry details and trivialities sink into their proper insignificance.

But in the experiences through which we are just now passing it is obviously not a question of things which we can put away from us, but of something which is of importance to our fate and to that of our nation, something, moreover, with regard to which each one of us must take a conscientious stand; and if it should happen that we were asked to take our stand this very day, it would be unreal for us to attempt to act as though the whole affair did not concern us here.

And so this year we stand once more at the entrance to the Passion-tide, with all the inward unrest which troubles our secret souls, with all the perplexities and cares and hopes which we cannot and dare not leave outside, and we wonder whither the path of our nation is leading.

This, then, is the conflict: the Passion-tide speaks of Christ's path of suffering, and we men and women of today are tormented by the question of the path of our nation. These two paths are quite different, and it will not do to establish a direct relation and connection between them.

It is false to say, as has actually been said, that because Christ had to suffer in order to fulfill his mission, therefore

our nation, too, must tread the way of sorrow in order to reach its destination. And there is just as little validity in that other thesis, by which many a man is heard to swear, that as Christ's path led through the cross to the crown so the path of our nation leads through suffering to glory. Such assertions are nothing more than wishful thinking and have nothing whatever to do with Christianity or Christ.

The suffering of Jesus was not the result of any natural law and cannot be taken as the standard example of a universally valid historical truth. It is true that in his suffering one may find confirmation of the principle that greatness is reached and realized only through sacrifice and self-denial. But we do not need Jesus' suffering to recognize the truth of this principle; in order to recognize and conform to it a man need not be a Christian; in order to act upon it a nation need not even have become a Christian nation.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to conclude that it is a matter of indifference to us as the German nation whether we are Christians or not. Nations are living creatures with body and soul; they have only one life, they come into being and die. They come into existence in manifold ways and die in manifold ways; but they always and of necessity die when the forces which gave them life fall into decay.

When our German nation was born, God gave it as soul the Christian faith. Our national development — whether we like the idea or not — has been inwardly based upon Christianity, and from the Christianity of the national soul have come all the forces which made our nation develop and grow.

Our nation would not be our nation but for the Reforma-



tion, but for the denominational schism which we often perhaps feel as a burden, but for the positive Christianity of the Lutherans and the Calvinists and the Catholics. Therein lives the soul of our nation, and it would literally be of no avail to us were we to gain the whole world and in so doing lose our soul. That is the real reason why there never has been and never will be for our German nation any rebirth which is not inwardly based upon a revival of the Christian faith. This nation — our nation — will either be a Christian nation or it will cease to exist.

For that reason we can and must ask the nation's political leaders to take this vital interest into account and not to be deluded into thinking that the question of religion can ever be a private matter among us. If such a mistaken policy is ever adopted — and we have surely been heading in that direction — our nation will dissolve into atoms; it will be denationalized and its historical existence will be at an end. And in thus ceasing to be, our nation would not be dying a natural death but would be guilty of committing suicide.

If a German statesman in these days stands up publicly for the protection and preservation of the Christian churches he soon becomes suspect, as though he were trying to use God to further his aims and plans. But we, dear friends, as Christians and as a community, should know that a German statesman is responsible to God for not letting the nation entrusted to his care lose its soul and with it its life. So much we can and must say for the sake of righteousness and for the sake of the nation from which we cannot separate ourselves, since God has put us here from our birth and even earlier, through our parents and ancestors; and so



much we must say because we love our nation as our mother and do not want it to die so terrible a death.

But — and now comes the “but” — we do not say all this in order to create the impression that with a government which protected and confirmed the alliance between the fate of the nation and the fate of the church everything would be as it should and we should have a guarantee of outward prosperity and inward recovery. We need not a guarantee, but an indispensable condition; not a guarantee because, of course, external prosperity does not depend upon ourselves alone.

Just as a healthy man is not sure of his life merely because he is healthy, and just as he may lose his life through an accident or through the treachery of others, so our nation is not sure of its life and so our nation can lose its life through superior force or through the violence of others. But just as an intelligent man knows these contingencies and yet at the same time takes care of his health, so must we as a nation know them and yet realize and bear our responsibility for the health of our nation.

But here again no government, however good and honest its intentions may be, can give permanent guarantees. Just because the inward recovery of our nation has, in accordance with God's guidance through the ages, become dependent upon whether and how far the Christian faith is alive and effective in our midst — just because of that we are now faced here with our wholly personal responsibility — with the question which is being put to us as Christians and as a church.

It is obvious that, both as Christians and as a church, we face today a unique crisis; and I am forcibly impressed with

the similarity between our situation and that described in the gospel which we have just heard, partly from the altar and partly from the pulpit. Jesus has invited a confession of faith from his disciples: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? . . . But whom say ye that I am?" And we are shown how, while others argued and wrangled about Christ's identity, the conviction grew and was established among his followers that he was none other than the Messiah, the Son of God: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The century and a half which lie behind us, those years in which our nation took it as a matter of course that all opinions should have equal rights, also showed us who men say that the Son of Man is, and revealed how far we as a nation had wandered from the gospel. But for that very reason this period also had its good points. It confronted us seriously with the question, "Will ye also go away?" The way was certainly free; the question forced us to reflect and to decide. "But who say ye that I am?" A profession of faith had to be made, and by virtue of that necessity, the Christian church emerged from this conflict of opinions stronger and more united in its views than we could have hoped or expected; and in the strife its creed gained new strength as well as new recruiting power and perhaps even new powers of persuasion. "Thou art Christ!"

We may possibly feel, therefore, as Jesus' disciples did, that the cause must now go forward and that a new beginning has been made which cannot fail to lead to success. Today, too, there is no lack of confident voices; today, too, there is no lack of ideas and plans to utilize the favorable situation for the cause of Christianity. The watchword is,

“Nationality and Christianity,” and surely with a little skill it may be translated into fact.

Yet now comes the real difficulty. Into this favorable situation come Jesus’ words about his suffering, those words which cut the ground from beneath all Christian propaganda. Peter is bitterly disappointed. He cannot and will not understand: “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee!” “What!” he seems to say, “just when we have realized that thy cause is our cause, just when we await thy command to act, thou speakest of suffering, of passivity! Let him who can or will understand that!” But Jesus turns resolutely away: it is Satan who speaks thus and opposes the divine decree of suffering with the all too human “No.”

The question, dear brethren, is whether, after all, it is not good and whether it has not a very special purpose, that the present day which our nation hopes will prove the turning point to bring us to a new life should force us as a Christian community to realize the necessity for Christ’s Passion. It is good and it has its very special purpose, for it is meant to show us that at this turning point there lurks a tremendous danger, a temptation of the devil. The disciple Peter here stands before us as a living proof of the fact that it is possible for a man to profess faith in Christ and at the same time unwittingly and unintentionally to stand in his way.

We Christians — we, the Christian community — can profess faith in Christ and yet obstruct his way — at the very time, too, when we think we are serving him. At the same moment we stand also in the way of our German nation and refuse the service which we owe it. And this danger becomes acute the moment we as Christians oppose the suf-



ferings of Jesus, the moment we as the church of Christ turn our minds to what is human instead of to what is divine.

The danger is there. Viewed from the human standpoint, it looks as though the Christian church in our nation could gain much, perhaps everything. It need not tread the path of suffering. It can, if it follows the ways laid out for it, develop a powerful propaganda without even denying its creed. Yet what good would that be to it or to our nation? "For whosoever will save his life" — these words are addressed to the church also — "shall lose it!"

That is why we Christians are today called to reflection; the purpose of the message of our Saviour's Passion is to put us back into the place right and fitting for us.

Peter wants to dabble in Christian politics. With "Christ" as his slogan he wants to win votes; he wants to win men and women who will shout hosannah to his Lord. There is no trickery about that.

But take care, Peter: what is neither trickery nor magic may still be the work of the devil! Christ wants no heralds to announce his coming. He wants no frenzied enthusiasm for his cause and no acclaiming of his person. He treads the path that leads to suffering and to the cross, and his adherents must also tread it, following in his steps. He who would profess faith in him as the Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer, can do so in no other way than by professing faith in the suffering and crucified Christ; and this profession of faith is valid only when it is meant as a profession of life. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me!"

We must study this profession of faith all our lives, dear brethren; we never come to the end of that road which we

call "the imitation of Christ." For what man denies himself, what man reaches the point of no longer knowing and serving his great ego? Which of us, I ask you, carries his cross; which of us does not yearn to be rid of every burden which he is asked to bear?

We will let ourselves be shown our place and will turn our eyes to him who goes before us. That — and nothing else — is the Christian service which our Lord wants from us, and with such service he carries on his work in the world and in our nation.

Such service may seem paltry to us in our eagerness to do great deeds; it is so fine and so human to make plans and to achieve results. Well, we are not deprived of such planning and achievement; we have opportunity and authority for them too in our work and in society. But we must not interfere with the office of the Lord Jesus Christ; we must not think that it is our duty to point out and to clear the way for him and for his church. All that is required of us is the obedience which follows him.

And at the same time we must know and hold fast to the fact that the greatest service we can render our nation is that we, as a Christian community, concentrate wholly on this obedience, for without a revival of Christianity there can be no rebirth of our nation.

So following in the steps of Christ  
Our Saviour let us go,  
And boldly, gladly, cheerfully  
Stand by him in his woe!

AMEN.



# THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

*(Fourth Sunday in Lent, 1933)*

After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias.

And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.

And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.

And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? (And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.)

Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were sat down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

— *John 6:1-13*



Five thousand men! Tired, hungry men, all of whom, animated by some kind of hope, have made the long journey round Lake Gennesaret in a veritable migration to Jesus, the man from whom emanate help and healing. In truth an edifying result, a visible sign of appreciation and trust.

I cannot help thinking that in that hour Jesus' disciples were joyfully, proudly and gratefully convinced that the cause was making progress.

Thus far we have a situation which may perhaps be compared with our own today; for obviously the eyes and interest of many of our nation are today turning again to the Prophet of Nazareth and to his message — thousands from whose lives he had disappeared are running after him and seeking to re-establish contact with him, desiring to belong once more to his fellowship which they had left, and wanting their children, who had hitherto grown up without him, to be baptized; and thousands more who bore the name of Christian without attaching any special significance to it are coming with new questions and expectations and are remembering that past generations found in him help in time of trouble and healing for their infirmities. "They saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased."

Why should not we, dear brethren, look joyfully, proudly and gratefully on this movement and feel that Christ's cause is surely making progress?

We feel that we too are living through a period of universal importance in the history of the world, inasmuch as Christianity is again seeking to become a public issue in our nation, a goal which cannot be achieved by us as a Christian community simply leading our quietly happy individual existence.

As disciples of Jesus we are here faced with a mission; for all these people surely want something, and that means that we must either give them to eat or ask, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" The modern term describing this situation is, "the problem of the masses."

But we must remember that this problem cannot be solved in a leisurely, profound, scientific fashion, but that it requires direct and immediate treatment because it concerns living men and women and is a matter of life and death. After all, the finest rescue plan is of not the slightest use if its carrying out takes so much time that the drowning man becomes a drowned man in the interval. I am thinking in this connection of old Father Bodelschwingh, who was seized with righteous impatience during the tedious preparations for the East African Mission. "Don't be so slow," he urged, "or the people over there will be dead."

And so at the present time, too, all our great planning is of pitifully little avail. When the multitude assembled Philip began to calculate, but he did not get far: "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them!" Where were they to get the two hundred pence, for one thing?

Our situation is in no wise more promising. When we begin to calculate we, like Philip, are at once brought up short, for in our case, too, the money problem is insoluble. The fact that more than a thousand vicarages are empty in Prussia and hundreds of deacons and deaconesses have been dismissed in Berlin alone is proof of the truth of this statement. It obviously serves no purpose to attack the problem of the masses as a question of finance and organization.

It is indeed a great pity that such a state of affairs should exist, and that it should exist of all times today, when the potentialities of labor are greater than they have been for many long years, if not for centuries. As things are, however, our only course is unreservedly to confess our impotence and poverty.



Andrew takes a more sensible attitude toward the whole affair than does his countryman and friend Philip; he is the avowed realist and reckons with the given facts: "What have we got and what can we do with the means at our disposal?" Yet the result of his calculations is no less distressing: "Five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" Very little — too little — nothing! Just enough for Jesus himself and his immediate followers. "We have nothing left," thinks Andrew; "we ourselves live from hand to mouth."

And here again we look into a mirror and see our own reflection, for do we as a community of Jesus Christ suffer from a superfluity of goods? Are we so rich in Christian commodities — in faith and love and hope — that we could give away some of them to be distributed among the masses? I believe that we are fortunate if we have enough faith to keep ourselves more or less afloat; and surely our love is in great straits, and of our Christian hope there remains at best a mythical silver streak, a *fata morgana*. Truly, we too have only five loaves and two small fishes and nothing else! What is that among so many? Shall the masses who are today bringing their hopes to Christ, to us as the Christian community and church of Christ, have their hunger appeased by us?

I hope, dear friends, that we still have enough feeling for and perception of reality to prevent our saying thoughtlessly, "Yes, they may come; everything is ready." If we did that we might share the fate of that church at Laodicea on which the judgment was passed: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest



not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked! ”

It is saddening to see people act as though the chief thing today were to institute a large-scale propaganda scheme for Christianity, as though the five thousand must at all costs become ten, twenty or a hundred thousand. In so believing it is easy to work ourselves into a state of Christian ecstasy and to exclaim: “ The cause is making progress! We can see that it is making progress! ” — as though there were no disappointment looming threateningly in the background; as though we had not sooner or later to answer the question, “ Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? ” . . . And then our poverty becomes obvious. Indeed, we are much poorer than we admit to ourselves.

We dream of the sustaining power and the comfort of our Christian religion; we swear by the superiority of the view of life taught us by the gospel. But when it comes down to hard facts, when it is a question of not doubting in sorrow but of keeping our faith, of not becoming bitter in tribulation, but of cultivating love, of not flinching in face of death but of glorying in hope — then all our dreamed-of wealth vanishes. And when we are confronted with one who would like to believe but cannot, one who needs our love, and we cannot help him in his despair and seek in vain for a word of genuine comfort — are not we, I ask you, ourselves living from hand to mouth?

Even we pastors — perhaps we pastors most of all! Even in our Protestant church, I think, the old superstition is still alive that we pastors, to a certain extent because of our office, must necessarily have a stronger faith, more love and a

firmer hope than other Christian men and women. But our one advantage is that, because of our office, we are daily faced with the task of feeding the multitude, that we are daily obliged to ask the question, "Whence shall we buy bread?" And therefore the poverty and wretchedness of our Christianity comes home to us, therefore every sermon means a fight with the tempter: "Five loaves and two small fishes: but what is that among so many?" Yes, perhaps not even five loaves and two small fishes; perhaps the bread will turn out to be stone!

And now come the many, now comes the multitude with some kind of confused yearning, with some sort of vague hope. . . .

Dear brethren! Since I have been a minister of the gospel I know what Luther meant, and every day reminds me of it. When we are faced with the problem of the masses we all know it with those two disciples of old, Philip and Andrew: "With all our vaunted Christianity, we are beggars"; and at the critical moment we stand with empty hands and have nothing adequate to offer. "The truth is, we are beggars!"

It must be thus. We must look this fact in the face and bow to it. It is not — as we might think — mere unlucky chance that today of all times, when the problem of the masses is becoming acute for us, the external resources of our church should be exhausted and the inner springs of Christianity almost dried up. Rather is it God's carefully planned guidance and divine dispensation. He it is who upsets all our plans and calculations; he it is who reveals as impossibilities all the possibilities of which we dream. It is Jesus himself who asks the disciples the question which none of

them can answer: "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" It is he who damps their optimism and ties their hands, so that they stand perplexed and inactive at the moment when an irretrievable opportunity is passing.

It must be thus; and to him who has eyes to see and ears to hear this gospel gives an answer to his question, "Why?" The reason is that Jesus Christ wishes to do his work himself: "For he himself knew what he would do!" Today, too, he knows what he will do.

But first of all we must leave the way clear for him. Never must we let it look as though his disciples have something to offer the hungry masses; never must we let it seem as though the church has at its disposal mysterious forces with which it can do as it likes! The disciples must appear before the multitude with empty hands and must invite them to the meal — and none of them knows whether in so doing he is making a fool of himself or not, and each of them is entirely dependent upon what Jesus does.

Thus — and thus alone — it must be with us. We have nothing to produce, nothing with which to appease the hunger of the multitude. Nay, more, perhaps our last resource, which could be misused or even misunderstood as a piece of self-advertisement on the part of the church — works of Christian charity and church welfare work as they have hitherto been known — perhaps this too is being taken from us so that we may be quite poor and quite empty-handed; so that it may be visible to all eyes that we Christians are nothing ourselves, that we Christians have nothing ourselves, that we Christians do nothing ourselves. We live by a miracle, and this miracle is called Christ; he is everything, he has everything, he does everything.



That is the testimony which we as Christians owe to those who today come to us with their hopes and problems and expectations. We are not concerned with the question of how these crowds of troubled men and women stand with regard to Christianity and the Christian church; our duty is to see that they meet the miracle called Christ.

Such a meeting — I call it a miracle in very truth! Surely it is a miracle that the Christ of the Gospels is alive — is alive *today*; that he carries on his work — and carries it on *today*; that he meets men and women — and meets them *today*; and that he feeds the hungry, and feeds them *today*, in our own day and age!

See, dear brethren, does not the real pity lie in the fact that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ here in the church, that here we take it almost as a matter of course to call him our Lord and to pray to him and to hearken to his words, but as soon as we are outside again, what a different world, what a totally different reality we are in! Suddenly the miracle seems to be extinguished: Christ — our Lord? Now — here? Is he not worlds away and separated from us by aeons of time?

Is it not simply that the force of circumstances compels us once more to shape our lives by our own strength and, if need be, to share what we are and have and do? And have we not done as much as we can if while so doing we preserve the golden mean between love of self and love of our neighbor? Possibly — but this halved love will satisfy no one's need, and there is no miracle about this breaking of bread; nor has the Lord Jesus Christ anything to do with it. We have left him in the church, you see; we have banished him from the present and its reality. How shall



he meet us and how shall we bear testimony to others concerning a miracle which we ourselves know only as a sacred story heard in church! Yes, there lies the real pity of it.

The fact is that outside the church service we no longer seriously believe that Christ the Lord really and truly relieves distress and appeases hunger. We no longer dare to take his words, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," as meant for us personally and for our personal acquaintances and friends, and to pass them on.

In the metaphor of today's gospel, we no longer trouble really to take and distribute the bread which Jesus breaks and offers to us, because we are convinced beforehand that it won't go around. What use has the man or woman of the twentieth century for the Redeemer of sinners, for the crucified and resurrected Christ, for the call to repentance and to faith? These things appease no one's hunger; and so we turn to our own particular creed and, if need be, change it into a sort of Christian sugar-icing, call it "view of life," "welfare work," "politics," "ethics," "religion" and what not. But the miracle does not take place, however longingly we wait for it and look for it; and no one's hunger is appeased.

I think, dear friends, that we now begin to see clearly what today's gospel is trying to teach us. The men and women around us are again asking for Christ, loudly or softly; the hunger for God is making itself felt. It seems to be time that the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand be repeated. But it is no miracle that this miracle does not happen, so long as we offer the people the sugary Christian confection of our own concoction. Surely we must

dare to bring them the bread which Jesus himself breaks, the simple, unaffected message of his word and work, of his life and suffering, of his death and resurrection — and nothing more. That will assuredly seem little — too little — to us at the moment: “What is that among so many?” But we must not take heed of such objections and scruples: we must dare to obey and to be Christ’s helpers. It is he who must perform the miracle; and he does perform it when we take his message seriously and obey him.

When Christ fed the five thousand the hunger of all was appeased and more than enough was left for the disciples; today, too, the hunger of all shall be appeased — all who hear and believe his message and all who pass it on in faith. For in the word which he offers us he gives us himself as the living Lord, as the miracle on which we live: “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

Lord, evermore give us this bread!

AMEN.

## WE WOULD SEE JESUS!

*(Jubilate: Third Sunday after Easter, 1933)*

And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast.

The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.

Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.

And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Unless a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor.

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. — *John 12:20-27*



Rejoice! Make a joyful noise, all ye lands!

Yes, that is what we feel like doing, for outside we see the verdant, blossoming spring, and around us we see the people of our nation awakening; and in spite of all its storm and stress, in spite of all its effervescence and fermentation, that awakening tells us that we are still a young nation which does not wish to be drawn into the collapse of Western civilization: we wish to live! May God speed us on our way!

And again I say, Rejoice! We have left Easter behind us and are now in the festive season of the Christian church. The message of life has again been spread abroad — of life that is stronger than the world and than death.

And so we welcome the young Christians who are today entering the fellowship of our church. You are doing right, young men and women, for here you will find a living Master with power over life and death; and we can tell you that it is worth your while to make his acquaintance and that it is a joy to serve him. Therefore to you also we would say, Godspeed!

In Christendom, too, there are signs of a returning spring. When I say that, I am not thinking of the lively and even passionate effort to transform the Protestant church into a state church which is being made today; I am thinking rather that the desire to know Jesus, to get into touch with him, to be guided by him, is again making itself felt — even in the case of those who have hitherto had little or no contact with him! “We would see Jesus!” And shall we not say Godspeed to this also?

We are very quick and willing to respond when it is a question of welcoming the spring. We would much rather sing “Glory to God” than “Lord, have mercy upon us,” and like the superficial creatures that we are we tend to take the bud for the fruit and the will for the deed. And have we not a good right to do so? After all, everything which is to become anything must in some way or other begin with the bud — with good will, with questioning, as in the case of the Greeks who had come to Jerusalem for the feast and now wished to see Jesus.

What prospects, what possibilities, are opened up when men really begin to question and to desire! He who utilizes this moment skillfully must surely be able to make something of such a friendly and well intentioned state of mind.

Well, dear brethren, in that case Jesus Christ for one may



be considered to have set about the matter in a very blundering fashion. In his reply to the Greeks there is not the slightest trace of wise pedagogics, of that progression from the simple to the difficult which first acknowledges the existence of the good will and then proceeds gradually to mold that good will into the right shape, until in the end it desires to do what it ought to! In the case which we are discussing the words concerning the cross are spoken abruptly, without preamble or disguise. They are the harsh answer to a mild question; and what the moment before was hope and seemed a possibility is now suddenly dead and extinguished. "Frost fell in the summer night. . . ." There is no way of getting past this hard fact which lies like a stone in our path; we are bound to stumble over it — and we are meant to stumble over it.

The incident presented in today's gospel is no isolated one. It is the same in every case where men come questioningly to Jesus for guidance from him. Whether it is the rich young man who was so pure in heart that Jesus loved him, whether it is the disciples with their great expectations and their hopes of a Messiah who would restore their nation, whether it is a Nicodemus or some other learned man interested in philosophy or theology — always the answer is quite unpedagogically harsh, so harsh that it leaves no room for development and growth and maturing such as we should like; always it is the preaching of the cross: it begins with the death of something and not with good will, with the corn of wheat and not with the bud.

Jesus encouraged no man to walk through life continually shedding what is imperfect and bad and faithfully and conscientiously developing into a really devout man; but he

speaks of conversion, of imitation, of self-denial and rebirth. And all these things mean the cross, mean dying. There is definite plan in these things. That is why we cannot get past them. That is why we are reminded of them even now, in the midst of this festive Easter season, lest we should imagine that the resurrection has rendered the cross valueless and superfluous. No; the cross still is forceful, and it is the only answer given by Jesus to the seeker after truth.

When we look closely we find that we are faced with a situation which is hopeless from the human point of view. The people are asking for Jesus, the young communicants must be — and perhaps even wish to be — brought to him. But even if we were better judges of mankind and more skillful spiritual leaders than we are we should still be faced with a problem which we simply cannot solve.

Our text indicates as much in a small point which we find incomprehensible at the first hearing. The Greeks in question apply to Philip; Philip does not know what to do and tells Andrew; finally both disciples go to Jesus, who utters the hard words about the corn of wheat and about hating one's life and about following him unconditionally. There is, you see, no conciliatory leading up to the point, such as the ordinary human being would expect; it is simply impossible for us pedagogically to utilize the apparently favorable situation in a way that might give us reasonable hopes of understanding his meaning.

The fact is that it is not a matter of understanding: how could any man have understood the words about the cross? And he who believed he did, assuredly misunderstood them. Faith in Christ can neither be taught nor learned, because all teaching and all learning come to grief on the mystery

of his cross, which inevitably remains a stumbling block even to the most devout will and folly even to the most shrewd reasoning.

Christian faith — and this is what distinguishes it from any religion which can be taught and learned — is a choice which is made in the solitude of the personal meeting with Christ — we may also say, in the personal meeting with his words about the cross. Today, to be sure, it is considered modern to talk about the faith of a nation and about the faith of our nation; we should, however, speak more honestly about religion, so as not to obscure its supreme importance. And this importance lies precisely in the fact that nobody can take this choice from me; nobody can even make it easier for me, or act as an intermediary for me.

Well, perhaps it is now becoming clear to us how little reason we have for raising a song of joy merely because around us or even within us there has begun a questioning and seeking. For as yet we have no idea on which side the decision will fall; we do not know whether the desire to see Jesus will end with the cry, “Crucify him!” or with the confession of faith, “I am willing to be crucified!” We have not that knowledge, and so all our springtime joy is premature, and all this yearning and wishing and hoping spell perplexity and fear for us, who should be helping to create real occasion for rejoicing.

How often am I told: “It must surely be a constant source of joy to you to teach so many young people who come with honest good will.” Yes, indeed: “We would see Jesus!” Of course it is a joy, of course it gives me joy. But, dear brethren, and you, dear parents, when we realize what is involved — that it is not a case of their being educated unto



faith but of their choosing a faith — then our joy soon disappears, then perplexity and fear begin, and then, whether we are parents or pastors, we see ourselves as part of that company of questioners and seekers after truth, we see ourselves as men and women to all of whom Jesus addresses the same words, in the same way, and all of whom are confronted with the fact and challenge of the cross.

Our task, therefore, is not to intercede, not to act the part of mediators, but rather to stand aside and let Jesus himself speak, so that those who seek him may meet him and make their choice. We are really only in the way with our good will, because our good will says “improvement” where Jesus means “conversion,” “development” where he speaks of “rebirth,” “life” where he demands “death.”

From our point of view this situation may seem hopeless and quite beyond our comprehension. But is it improved, I wonder, if we join the ranks of those who seek and question, those who desire only to hear for themselves what Jesus is saying?

As a matter of fact, dear brethren, Jesus has no message for Philip and Andrew other than that he has for the Greeks who sought him; he must say to those who know him and who feel that they are his disciples exactly what he says to those who do not know him and who have not yet come to him. And so he confronts us, who have long regarded ourselves as Christians, who were confirmed and received into his fellowship years ago, with the same demand he makes of the young and the old who now wish to come to him. And this demand is: “The corn of wheat must die; this life must be counted as nothing; he who wishes to serve me must follow me!”



This being so, it is not possible for us to escape the edict of the cross; it is not possible for us to arrange this dying so that we are finished with it once and for all. We deceive ourselves if we think that we could leave the great conversion behind us and, now that the Good Friday of our lives is past, walk serenely in the Easter light of the new life. No; Christ's words about dying are still meant for us, and they are meant for us again and again. If our Lord Jesus Christ says, "Repent!" he commands that the whole life of his followers be a continuous repentance. Over all our actions stands God's *no*, and in the fact that we oppose this *no* with our *yes* lies the real trouble, the sin which separates us from God and makes our position — if we have the sense to see it — so hopeless.

The words concerning the cross are said to us, and Jesus himself sets his cross before us, so that we may be forced to make a choice, and so that we may also be enabled to say *no* to our actions and our life, and thus cease resisting God.

Then there will be room for God's grace to enter in; then, after our actions and life are condemned by his *no* and when we agree to this verdict with our own *no* — God will utter his *yes* to us, and Jesus' promise will come home to each of us personally: "If the corn of wheat die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, him will my Father honor."

And so there comes to us a new hope. But it comes only when we have buried our old hopes. For between this new hope and us stands the cross, stand Jesus' hard words about dying. And the cross and these words look dark and forbidding to us as long as we stand before them seeking and

questioning — as long as we do that, they mark the end of all our hopes and wishes and powers. For to all of these things God says *no*! And only when we bow to this *no* do we hear the *yes* of God's grace and see the other side in the light of the promise: much fruit, eternal life, honor from God!

Then we sing a new song of joy; and this new song does not take its ring of joyful confidence from our pious yearning and seeking after Jesus, but from what seems to us a stumbling block and foolishness, and is yet the power of God: from the preaching of the cross!

AMEN.

## ALL MEN

*(Rogation Sunday: Fifth Sunday after Easter, 1933)*

I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus;

Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

—1 Tim. 2:1-6



This is an exhortation, and it must be admitted that as a rule we are not exactly eager to lend an ear to exhortations. Really to listen to an exhortation and take it in requires quietness and a special attitude of inward preparedness, and if these are absent — as we remember from our experiences with our children or from memories of our own childhood — the best intentioned exhortation is simply thrown away.

There is no doubt that the apostle is tremendously in earnest when he “first of all” desires that Christians shall pray for *all* men, that they include every man in their prayers and supplications, their intercessions and thanks. Yes, how earnest he is about it, and how utterly undiplomatic is the sentiment underlying his demand! I mean to say: Paul asks us to pray for *all* men, not in order to induce us to pray for at least a good many men. That he is really thinking of

prayer for *all* at once becomes clear when he names kings and those in authority as people who must be included. For here he is referring not to a Christian government and not even to a government which is neutral in religious matters, but to the Emperor Nero and his counselors.

Paul is imposing on the Christian community the exacting duty of including its avowed enemies and persecutors in its prayers. To understand these words fully, therefore, we should have to be living today as Christians in Russia and not in Germany. We must first translate them into our own language and into our own situation; and then we are reminded of other words, those uttered by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, which say the same thing in terms which everyone can understand: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." That and nothing less is what Paul means when he exhorts us here to pray for all men, and therein lies the whole importance and the whole irksomeness of his exhortation.

Is the hour quiet enough, I wonder, and is our inward preparedness great enough for us to give ear and to hear? We can scarcely answer this question offhand in the affirmative.

Undoubtedly the original idea of this "rogation" or "supplication" Sunday was to mark the threshold between the festive Easter season and the period preceding Pentecost, to provide us opportunity to gain the quietness necessary for reflection upon the thought that all prayer in the name of the living Lord must be prayer for the coming of his Spirit and its effectual working in our lives.

But of course, when all is said and done, the church year unfolds quietly and unobtrusively, reminding us once a week



at most of its existence. And its voice is easily drowned, because other, louder voices are constantly forcing themselves upon our attention. And, speaking quite generally, the present moment is possibly unfavorable for any kind of listening. At the best of times we are ready to listen only so long as what we hear coincides with our own opinion; but today we are all more or less crammed full of passionate, burning desires, of hopes or even of fears; and the inclination to see in our neighbor anything more than the mere ally of our wishes or the mere opponent of our will is almost wholly wanting. Yes, this request that we "first of all" make room in our prayers for all men — for all, even for those who are our enemies and do us wrong — is not without a certain comic element for the man who lives wholly in the present and who knows that what is wanted today is clear-cut decision and not compromise, separation and not concordat.

Today we like to talk optimistically of the new fellowship of the nation. But it is becoming more and more evident that even this new fellowship is such that it not only binds but at the same time divides, and that it signifies not only union but also demarcation and separation. Does it not strike you as truly laughable and grotesque — and now for once I must quite openly call things by their names — that a nazi Stormtrooper who has been shot and crippled should pray for Severing, and vice versa that an official who has been dismissed because of his origin should pray for the men of the national government? Impossible, we say; and yet if we say that we only express the fact that we cannot face the command of Jesus and the exhortation of Paul.

Thus it is clear that we have little reason to interpret the call for the church, which is today heard on all sides, simply

as the voice of reviving faith. Nevertheless, we may be glad of it, for it may be that here we have a dawning possibility; it may be that this calling will be followed by a listening which will hear God's answer. But this much is certain: God's answer will in every case prove irksome; it will in every case reduce our passions to nought; and then and only then will it be possible to decide whether this movement is truly a movement toward God or whether it will turn away from him in vexation.

Our nation as a whole has not yet reached the crossroads; the choice has still to be made. One sometimes has the impression that the need for the choice has not yet been seen.

We Protestants are at present in the midst of a large-scale reconstruction of our church. The newspapers devote columns to it, and the forces which are urging it forward are — we may surely assume — animated by honest purpose and by contagious and irresistible enthusiasm.

Among many sections of our people the hope has sprung up that there will now be a new understanding between our nation and the Christian church, between our nation and God! And we hope with all our heart that through the movement now developing in our church obstacles will be swept away and the way made clear. But we must not expect more; we must not act as though we needed only the right church in order to lead the whole nationally awakened German people through a wide-open door into the kingdom of God.

The truth is that every one of us without exception must pass through the strait gate of repentance and faith; every one of us must stand before the One who is the Mediator between God and men — the man Christ Jesus. And there we have

the stumbling block. For in his sight neither what we regard as our rights, nor our will and desire, nor our ardor and passion are of any value. He wishes to destroy all these things, and he does destroy them, by uttering God's message of redemption and forgiveness, of new obedience and perfect love. That is the point at which it will be decided whether our nation, which has begun to seek the church, will let itself be found by God. And God grant that this whole young church movement may not pass by the one and only Mediator and so decide against God!

As far as we are concerned, however, the matter does not end with this pious wish. Now we see the responsibility which we as a Christian community, as an evangelical church, have to bear and to fulfill at this moment.

I mean to say, we are not disinterested or only inwardly interested spectators. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus Christ has founded his community and set it in the midst of the nations — in our nation too — so that it may proclaim him the sole Mediator, so that any man who inquires after God and any nation which begins to seek God may meet him, the Christ of God, and not pass him by.

The result of this meeting is not ours to determine; but it is incumbent upon us to see that the meeting takes place, and takes place in such a way that the holy and gracious will of God is revealed. "God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." If today there is an inquiring and a seeking after God — and there is, we can all hear and see it for ourselves — then God is seeking us and asking us what message we are proclaiming; then he wishes us to testify concerning the Lord Jesus Christ so loudly, so clearly and so plainly that all this inquiring and



seeking must explain itself to him and must render an account of itself to him.

And now please do not think that this is a matter for pastors and theologians, or should be such. We are not concerned here with ideas, for they are too colorless, nor with words, for they do not penetrate; but we are concerned with the fact that in the midst of all the questioning and the seeking the community of Jesus exists as a fellowship of men and women who are not governed by their own wishes and passions but by the Spirit and will of God, and who thus become a stumbling block to the people in our midst who are beginning to inquire about the church and to seek God.

We can now become quite practical, for we are at the point where, it seems to me, the exhortation of Paul really comes home to us in full force — the exhortation which bids us “first of all” pray for all men, regardless of enmity and friendship, of sympathy and antipathy.

The community of Jesus Christ must give expression to the fact that God will have all men saved. That does not mean that the love preached and practiced here is fundamentally weakness which hopelessly confuses good and evil. No, the love of Christ is a holy, judicial love in whose presence evil cannot exist, and the goodness of God works repentance in him who sees this love in the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we are all pardoned only after we have been condemned, and saved only after judgment has been passed upon us. And that is the very thing which makes it impossible for us to judge and to condemn; that is the very thing which makes us know for a certainty that God wishes to give his salvation to all men.

We cannot set up dividing walls within the community of Christ; we cannot enforce human claims within the commu-



nity of Christ; we cannot cultivate fanaticism and passion within the community of Christ. If we did so, we should be opposing God's jurisdiction and sacrificing his grace; and we should be betraying our function — the only one we have — for we could not become the stumbling block which would help the seeker after God to find Christ.

A community which lets itself be controlled by human motives and aims, though these may be of the noblest and best, no longer has any impulsive force as a community of Christ, for it lacks the stumbling block over which all are meant to fall and thus be brought to reason, so that God can have mercy upon all men.

And that is just the point. That is why the community of Christ has only to fulfill the charge laid upon it by its Lord, and in so doing fulfill the will of God. It has to testify concerning God's jurisdiction to which it bows, and it does this by neither calculating nor judging. It has to bear witness to God's grace by which it lives, and it does this by exercising love toward all the men and women with whom it comes into contact, toward Christians and infidels and Jews. It exercises this love as a prayer, as supplication, intercession and thanksgiving for all.

To work toward the fulfilling of Christ's charge is to live the quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty of which Paul speaks. We know the phrase from the beautiful prayer of St. Chrysostom, and I am probably not the only one here who has found these words a "rock of offense"! These words ought to be a stumbling block to us and so force us to pause and to reflect. They mean that obedience to the will of its Lord lifts Christ's community out of the unrest of human passions and the turmoil of human love and hate;

they represent a new relation of peace between God and men. It is more important, however, that we act upon this knowledge than that we merely know it. Even in our community there are men and women who have become lonely, who doubt God and men and are at odds with their fate because they feel exiled and outcast. Should not we as Christians find our way to them? And is it not our duty, as a testimony to the will of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, thus to become a stumbling block to those, in particular, who want the church only because of earthly hopes and national desires? "God will have all men to be saved and to come unto a knowledge of the truth!"

Yes, we have a duty as a Christian community; and in order that it may be fulfilled let us hearken to Paul's exhortation as addressed to ourselves, so that we may "first of all" give to all men the love which we owe them, the love which can even pray for them.

AMEN.

## THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN

*(Harvest Thanksgiving, 1933)*

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully.

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

— *Luke 12:15-21*



For the first time our German nation joins with us in celebrating the harvest thanksgiving of Protestant Christendom as an official national festival, as the "German Peasant's Day."

This is undoubtedly a significant event, and its happening is not by mere chance. We are reminded that we as a nation have begun to remember the foundations of our existence, that after a period of imaginary independence we are ruefully returning to the bonds which are imposed upon us, whether we like them or not, and which we cannot cast off without ourselves perishing. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease."

It is a law imposed upon the earth by God that the soil

shall give men food, but only when we work for that food in the sweat of our brow. And that is true of this divine law which is true of all God's laws: they are over us and we can never disregard them with impunity.

"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." I am thinking in this connection of the classic story about the king whose touch turned everything to gold and who was thus brought to the verge of a miserable death by starvation. Verily, according to the will of God the Creator, a man's life consisteth in his daily bread which must be wrested from the soil again and yet again. We are all actually dependent upon the man who tills the soil; our lives are literally in the hands of the farmer, the nobility of whose calling lies in the fact that he is appointed by God to give our nation its daily bread. That is what gives the countryman his standing in the national life; that is what gives him as a member of the working classes his special mission and responsibility, his special value and merit. And we are glad that this fact is today again being plainly and emphatically recognized, and that in this way a primeval decree of God is again being honored by us. We also hope that this discovery will not end with the solemn proclamation of this day, but that our nation and its leaders may succeed in evolving from the clash of interests and the disintegrated elements of the social structure a genuine, serviceable union of the various social classes, such as we yearn for in our innermost hearts and such as we think we already see in its early stages.

Surely, then, it is not a matter of indifference whether the peasantry can carry out its service to the social body with joy and confidence, or whether it lives under the constant pres-



sure of worry and impending despair which must paralyze it.

On the other hand, it is not enough merely to give each social class what is its due and so create the preliminary conditions for a healthy organic national life. We are happy to have rediscovered a forgotten truth, to have learned again that we are not free, unattached individuals, but are bound up with one another and dependent upon one another in manifold ways. We again feel ourselves to be created beings, men and women who are not simply what we should like to be but what we are obliged to be because of a bond which is imposed upon us and is an integral part of our being. Once more we have come to regard profession and social standing, race and nationality as important facts which make inescapable demands upon us.

And so we have grown accustomed to talk of the rediscovery of the order of creation, of the recovered first article of faith: "I believe that God created me." That knowledge has come upon us like a deliverance, nay, like a redemption. We perceive for the first time how narrow was the prison yard round and round which our beloved ego walked. Now the gates have been pushed open; beyond them we see a multitude of duties which we are called upon to perform, and we go to them with the clear conscience which comes from the rediscovered truth that these tasks have been set us and we simply cannot escape from them.

In the spiritual revolution which is beginning to take place throughout our nation we hear a divine call, which demands new action from us. And somehow our new role seems to us quite obvious. We believe that in what is happening around us today we can read what we have to do, as plainly as the

conviction came home, after brief deliberation, to the farmer in the gospel story: "I must build new and larger barns in order to house the fruits of my harvest. That is clearly what I must do at this time, and then I need not fear the future!" The man was perfectly right — and yet he was making a fatal mistake; for he thought further: "Soul, thou hast now enough for years to come; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be happy!"

Dear brethren! We today are in a similarly dangerous position: we have grasped the task of the moment; we see quite correctly what has been neglected and what must now be done. But we, too, think further and say to ourselves: "What we do today must contain a guarantee for the future." We are returning to the divine plan; we are putting back in its rightful place the article of faith which deals with the creation. And when God's order is restored, when each social class and each individual is again in the proper place, the future of our nation cannot but be assured.

But as a matter of fact, by this line of reasoning — from knowledge which is correct in itself and from a desire and action which are justified in themselves — we are creating a romantic delusion, an utterly untrustworthy illusion! In reasoning thus we fail to realize that the order of creation cannot be restored; for if it is true that we have destroyed it and feel that we must now go back to it (and this is certainly true), it is also true that God himself has destroyed it and refuses to allow us to go back to it.

The gates of Paradise do not open again and before them stands the angel with the flaming sword. Between the will of God the Creator and our desire there yawns an abyss, and when we try to cross it we are swallowed up; for there a divine

law comes into force and proves our undoing. "The wages of sin is death!" Death!

Hence we can no longer base any hope of security on the claim that we belong to God's creation, nor is the existence of our nation guaranteed by the fact that it is remembering the divine order. God does not do us the favor of standing surety for our desires. We cannot present him with a bill, saying: "We have done our part and restored the order which was destroyed; now we expect the *quid pro quo* which is due us!"

Our lives are set in the creation which has fallen and broken away from God. We live under the curse of sin and under the law of death. And so all security becomes a dream and a delusion. We may dream this dream for a while, we may cherish this delusion for a time; but confronted with the fact of death the deception becomes obvious and then indeed we understand that we have been fools.

If we open our eyes and do not deceive ourselves, we need not fall into such a fatal error. The sentence of death which God pronounces on his own creation rings often and clearly enough in our ears; the uncertainty of our human existence, nay more, the uncertainty even of our national existence, is brought home day after day to our minds.

We could and we should know something of the fundamental uncertainty to which all created things are heir; we could and we should know of the deadly rift that runs through the whole of nature; we could and we should actually realize for ourselves that all so-called trust in God which is no more than a belief in the created world and its ordinances is a highly dubious affair and would inevitably make us spiritually bankrupt in the end.

It would be a calamity for our nation if the present up-



heaven should result in nothing but a new natural piety which today and tomorrow enthusiastically cries, "God is with us!" and at the first big disappointment changes its watchword and with equal passion shouts, "There is no God!" This danger has, at the moment at least, not been overcome; the awakening German nation has only recently stumbled upon God's ordinances in the course of its religious reflections, and it is still hoping to assure its future and to come to an understanding with God by complying with these ordinances. And so we have celebrated the "Day of German Labor" and the "Day of German Youth"; and so we are today celebrating the "Day of the German Peasant."

All this may be good and useful and necessary. But our nation has not yet met again the living God himself who is ruler over all those ordinances; it is not yet conscious that even over those ordinances hang the judgment of God and his sentence of death. When we realize that, when we know the living God as well as his ordinances, then our natural trust in God, our faith in the purpose of the world and in the harmony of creation, fail hopelessly, and we stand as fallen sinners who are worthy only of death and to whom no wealth in the created world can be of the slightest avail. Then the despised word "grace" again receives a meaning; yes, "grace" becomes the word on which our life depends, because it is the only word which is still of value before the judgment seat of God.

It is not we, however, who speak this word, nor does the world of created things. That God is gracious to us is something which we cannot deduce either from our own lives or from the history of our nation. As in the case of the rich man, in the moment of supreme good fortune God may



stretch out his hand in anger against us; this lesson we learned from our nation's experience twenty years ago.

The grace of God comes to us only in one person and that one person is Jesus Christ. Without him we can have no real faith which holds fast to God as the heavenly Father; without him we can reach no happy belief in the first article of faith, as Luther has translated it into German for us. That faith which enables us to take and live our earthly life as a gift from God, to love and serve our nation, to celebrate harvest festivals and to thank God for the things which make it possible for us and for our nation to live, although we know that neither our life nor that of our nation will be long upon the earth — that sustaining faith which believes in spite of everything, “*Nevertheless I am continually with thee!*” we owe to the One who makes us rich in God. And that One, the living Lord of his church, is waiting for our nation to meet him and to find life and perfect peace in him. God grant these blessings to us all!

AMEN.

# THE CHOSEN GENERATION

*(People's Mission, 1933)*

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. — *1 Pet. 2:9*



Today, dear fellow worshipers, the hope which unites us all and which must unite us as long as we seriously wish to be called Christians, is that this turbulent time which is stirring up our nation and troubling it to its very depths may not have come upon us in vain. Somehow or other we all feel that it is not with the nation alone that the Lord God is trying out new methods; he also has something new and special in view with regard to his church in our midst.

It is true that while waiting for God to reveal his plan we may have the same experience as the prophet Elijah of old. We may fear that God is coming to us in wind and earthquake and fire, and that under his mighty tread all things must surely be shattered and perish. In sooth, our church has been thoroughly shaken out of its self-satisfied and meditative calm as never since the days of the Reformation. It is experiencing a real revolution, an upheaval which is leaving no stone standing on another. Wherever we look we see new men, new offices, new laws and new ordinances.

Under these circumstances it is easy to understand why many of our members — particularly those who love their church because they owe it some debt of gratitude — are

becoming weary and dispirited, and are asking, "What will be the end of it all?" This anxious question is certainly not unjustified, and it cannot be disposed of simply by referring the questioner to those others of our members who believe that from this upheaval new life will inevitably come forth. The fact that everything is being changed does not mean that things must now be better, nor does it mean that they will necessarily be worse. Neither our hopes nor our fears, however earnest and honest they may be, can help us to foretell the result.

Does God intend to punish us by thus turning the Protestant church upside down? Or is his aim to give us a new beginning? Dear friends, we do not know and we cannot know. For God is not in the wind nor in the earthquake nor in the fire; these are merely the messengers and heralds who precede him and announce his coming; these are the signals which rouse us and bid us prepare to meet our God.

The main thing — and the purpose of these days through which we as a church are passing — is that we shall make ready, with new zeal and new seriousness, to hear — nay, to listen for — what God wishes to tell us. For we cannot possibly deny that in spite of all we have gone through in the last twenty years our Christianity has remained an extremely uninspired and plebeian affair.

All around us today we hear the cry for a happy, strong, virile, proud faith. We can challenge that demand; we can very easily object that that will not do, for after all the Christian faith is a deadly serious affair and is based on the forgiveness of sin, and to make forgiveness possible the Lord Jesus Christ had to suffer and die upon the cross. But in actual fact, of course, we have made no such objection. We

have said nothing at all. And when at any time and in any place we have been stopped and asked about our faith, we have generally kept an embarrassed silence instead of making a bold and manly confession of our creed. "Please do not question me," we say. "My faith is my most private and personal affair; and if you take me for a Christian, then please let my faith alone and I'll not meddle with yours." Such narrowness is utterly intolerable. And not only that: such so-called Christianity justifies that caustic critic and enemy of Christ who said, "The Christians would have to look more redeemed for me to believe in their Redeemer." As Christian men and women we dare not and may not give the impression of continually apologizing for our presence.

We must give earnest attention to the call for a joyous, glorious faith, for there is obviously something wrong in the present state of affairs. Our faith is normally no more than an opinion, of the same nature as our opinions about every possible subject — men and things, life and death, God and the world. Everything is a matter of opinion. One person looks at a thing in this way and another in that, according to where he is standing and to the angle from which he is viewing it. And why should not each have his own view, his particular way of looking at things — indeed, at the world!

Now we arrive at our opinions in two ways. Some of them we inherit from our parents; others we acquire in the course of our experiences. So natural do we consider these processes that when someone proclaims the superiority of his faith, we — regarding that faith as no more than opinion, either inherited or acquired — forthwith label him pre-



sumptuous and conceited. And indeed, if faith is no more than opinion we are correct in so thinking and in concluding that it is impossible to benefit the world or our nation or anybody else with it.

Up to the present day the Christian has been, as a rule, essentially a private individual with Christian convictions of some sort; and therefore Christianity as a whole has been a humble, somewhat timid and paltry affair, with no real force and no true life in it. Now, however, we can no longer make shift with that sort of thing. It is no longer possible for us to hold that kind of faith: it is a rotten tree blown down by the wind of these days; it is a dilapidated hovel destroyed by the earthquake of the new times; it is a thatched roof devoured in an instant by the fire.

Of what use, then, are our convictions and opinions, our ideas and ideals today? They have all long since been swept into the maelstrom of a seething, foaming, radically changing time. None of our carefully arranged plans now serves any purpose. We are starting again from the beginning; we are once more at the primitive stage of seeking no more than a safe spot on which to stand.

What is really meant by faith? What after all do we know about God? And what has our short, precarious human life to do with him? It is good to ask these questions; it is good to end by becoming so humble that we can keep silent and listen; for we know nothing of God and can know nothing of him unless he himself talks to us, unless he himself tells us what we are to think about him and expect from him.

All faith which aims at being more than an opinion held

today and tomorrow swept away by the wind — all faith which, by binding us to the living God, really represents strength and support — depends upon God's word reaching us. By God's word I mean not what we or others think and say about God, but what God thinks about us and says to us. That and that alone is the foundation of the faith which has the right to bear his name! And we can hear this word of God to us if we open our minds to it, not as a doctrine, not as a church dogma, but as a call which concerns us, as a living voice which is seeking us: "Adam — man — where art thou?" This word became flesh; before us and among us stands the Lord Jesus Christ, and in him the eternal and inaccessible God speaks to us, his creatures.

We now begin to be aware of the immeasurable distance which separates us from God, the abyss of sin and disobedience which lies between God and us, the darkness which keeps us from seeing God; but even as we do so, we hear the voice calling to us: "Be comforted and fear not! It is I! I come to seek that which was lost and to save sinners. I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Faith, dear brethren, means hearing God's call with which he has "called us out of darkness into his marvelous light." Faith means letting oneself be found by the Lord Jesus Christ who is even now on his way to seek us.

This faith lives by God's great deeds; this faith understands what the apostle says: "Ye are a chosen generation" — the generation on whom God has bestowed his friendship; "the royal priesthood" that may stand free and happy before the King of kings; "the holy nation," redeemed, bought, and won from all sin, from death and the power of the devil;

“the peculiar people” that may belong to him and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in eternal righteousness and purity and bliss.

Thus, based upon God’s works faith becomes truly happy and strong and virile and proud. Thus faith loses the meanness characteristic of all human thought. Then we become certain of our cause because it is God’s cause; then courage and humility, pride and simplicity, strength and goodness are marvelously intermingled.

Such faith knows how rich it is and knows, too, that it lives by undeserved and wonderful goodness. “By the grace of God I am what I am.” And for that reason there is nothing narrow, self-satisfied or complacent about it.

According to Luther’s well known phrase, true faith is “a living, active, energetic thing.” It is not only the hypothesis and preliminary condition of all preaching of the gospel; it is life and action itself; it is itself a proof of the great works of God, “that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

The important thing today is that our nation again come into personal contact with the eternal God, that it again let itself be found by the Lord Jesus Christ. The meaning and aim of every “People’s Mission” is toward this end. For “neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”

We must not deceive ourselves, however, dear brethren, by thinking that in the long run this result could ever be permanently achieved through Christian organizations and propaganda campaigns. It is you as a congregation and you as individuals who must bring it about. Living faith, living



Christians, living congregations — that is what the People's Mission must stand for, otherwise the labor will be in vain.

So today God is calling us and bidding us believe — not only for our own sakes, but for the sake of our brothers and sisters, for the sake of our nation. God is calling us in the Lord Jesus Christ out of darkness into light, out of the gloom and uncertainty of our own opinions, which are today of no use to us, into the brightness and certainty of his good and gracious will, so that we may hear and believe, and so that our hearing and believing may become a testimony to his glory. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

AMEN.



# JUSTIFICATION WITHOUT THE DEEDS OF THE LAW

*(Reformation Festival, 1933)*

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. — *Rom. 3:28*



This year's Reformation festival comes at an unfortunate time. There have already been and there are still to be so many celebrations in connection with the Luther jubilee that the thirty-first of October has passed almost unnoticed; and even this day, which is Reformation Sunday, is not meeting the public sympathy and attention which it probably would were we not busy with so many other things — the winter relief work, the four hundred fiftieth anniversary of Luther's birthday, the thought of the twelfth of November, the preparations for Luther day. Moreover, within the Protestant church there is so much that is in a state of transition, of growth and decay, that really there is scarcely time or room for retrospection.

In itself, this situation need not be wrong. It is even good for us to be forced to take the present very seriously and to ask where our immediate duty lies. Today, especially, it may be a true blessing if we forget the eternal yesterday which restrains and hampers us, and which — particularly in the church — keeps us at the question of "right or wrong," when in reality the problem has long been "to be or not to be." For the church of the German Reformation is

again faced with the question of its existence, and no amount of bragging about the union of the many established churches which has been achieved and no reference to the principle of episcopal leadership which has been put into operation can dispose of this question and the problem which it sets. The question simply insists upon being heard and the problem upon being tackled. Rome today stands secure in the unassailable position of the concordat; and meanwhile the new battlefront of German-Teutonic piety is being drawn up and has already begun its first offensives. Thus the signs do not seem to point to a peaceful development, but rather to the beginning of a struggle; and so in truth there is no time to lose in the company of memories.

Thus the 1933 picture of Luther, which represents him as a fighter, is also in complete harmony with the present situation. We do not want the Luther of yesterday and of the day before yesterday; we have no desire to learn from the past what Luther was to his time and to our fathers; we are scarcely affected by what he taught and thought. Luther is to us the symbol, the model and the prototype of the religious Christian hero, the pattern for the church leader for today and tomorrow.

Much is being said and written at the present time about the "Luther spirit." If one looks critically at the use of the term, one sees that behind all this talk and writing is deep respect for the impressive human qualities of this man — for his naïve unconcern, his intrepid courage, his tenacious steadfastness, his straightforward and unflinching will, his profound tenderness — and behind it all lies an unfulfilled desire: "If only we had more of this Luther spirit, the outlook for our nation and our church would be better. Let

us cultivate this Luther spirit today, and tomorrow we will be a step forward! ”

Good and well, dear brethren. Certainly I do not wish to dissuade anyone from taking the man Luther as a pattern; but I must certainly dissuade anyone from thinking — nay, I must seriously warn anyone against thinking — that the struggle for existence between the Protestant church and Rome and the neo-paganism of today could possibly be waged and won with this Luther spirit. Such a belief would be a fatal error, and it really looks as though the devil had only been waiting for this Luther anniversary to set afoot a roaring trade with this delusion in Protestant Christendom; for though we cannot cast out the devil through Beelzebub, the devil may drive out the spirit of Luther with the “Luther spirit”! Therefore beware! For here it may easily come to pass that the prophet Luther will be replaced by the man Luther and that we shall take our inspiration from the human hero instead of listening to the message which God sent us through him.

However paradoxical it may seem, the same Luther who put the candle of the gospel back into the candlestick so that it might give light to all in the house — that same Luther will become the bushel under which the light is hid and finally extinguished if we in the Protestant church preach and cultivate such a Luther spirit. The great reformer himself knew what he was doing when he opposed his followers’ desire to name themselves after him and mockingly and drastically called himself “an old bag of worms.” “It is not I who matter,” he said; “it is not the man — the fighter — the hero — or whatever else you may call me — who matters; so for God’s sake don’t make a new saint of me!”



For God does not want men who model themselves after any saint whatever, even though his name happens to be Luther. God wants men who believe that in spite of all that separates us from him, he is our Father and Lord by virtue of the grace he freely gives us; and this grace, which gives us free access to God, which furnishes us with faith in God as our Father and Lord, exists only in the one person in whom God himself comes to us: "his name is Jesus Christ." He is the light of the world; and it was Luther's mission to make this light shine for us in undimmed brightness, yesterday and today and to all eternity. *Solus Christus* — Christ alone!

There is absolutely no sense in talking of Luther and in celebrating Luther's memory within the Protestant church if we stop at Luther's image and do not look at him whom Luther is pointing out to us. The temptation is great, for Luther as a German is nearer to us than the Jewish rabbi of Nazareth. Luther with all his corners and edges is less offensive to us than this Jesus whom — to our annoyance — no one could or can convict of sin. Between us and Luther the distance is relative, for when all is said and done Luther is one of us; between us and Christ the distance is infinite, for after all Christ is God. But faith in Luther remains hollow and ineffective if we do not join with Luther in confessing our faith in Christ and Christ alone. Therefore I think that the best thing that has been said so far during the Luther jubilee is the simple message which Hindenburg gave to the present Reichsbishop: "See that Christ is preached in Germany!"

At first glance it seems self-evident that this is being done. We have often enough heard it said that the creed remains



inviolate; Christ remains the Lord of the church, and the heritage of the Reformation must be loyally guarded. But is it really so indisputably apparent? Is it really so self-evident? Or does "preaching Christ" mean something other than preaching Christ alone, something other than preaching the word of him who says, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me"? And if we hear and take in the message of Christ, are we not forced to draw the sole possible conclusion and to confess with the Jew Paul and the German Luther: "Therefore — after we know Christ — we conclude that a man is justified in the sight of God by faith without the deeds of the law"? It may be that these words are already so familiar to us children of the Reformation that they have ceased to have any meaning for us.

We think in this connection of Paul, how he fought and strove that the gentiles might be allowed to become Christians without being circumcised and without conforming to the Jewish law. We think of Luther, how he turned against the false belief of Rome, which held that in order to find favor in the sight of God Christian men and women must first earn God's grace little by little with "good works." And we are comfortably convinced that these things no longer affect us; these times are past. We have long since learned to take a larger view of God, and for that reason we remain Protestants in face of all Jewish and Roman authority; the law no longer troubles us.

And yet, dear brethren, the law by which men would like to win God's favor is still with us; it is part of the iron stock in trade of all pious humanity and of every true religion. The old Jewish law had long been dead in Christendom when Luther fought against the "law of works" of the

Church of Rome, and today for us this law of Rome has also long been dead. But — the law is dead, long live the law! If need be, we ourselves make the law in order to be able to plead before God that we have fulfilled it.

Faith itself became the “law of true belief” almost in Luther’s day. You must have the proper faith, then you will be right with God: that was the law of orthodoxy. And when its hollowness became apparent people soon found a new law. You must act rightly, then you will be right with God: that was the law of the “Enlightenment.” And then came the law of the free moral personality as the law of truly unbounded possibilities: each his own lawgiver, with God agreeing to the self-made law and approving of it. So many laws — and so many false trails! And we have not nearly finished with them. Fifteen years ago there were people who thought and said that he who takes the will of God seriously must be a socialist. Today, with even greater passion, there is being set up a law which says, “If you are as much of a nationalist and as much of a socialist as our Führer desires, you are a Christian though you may not know it.” It is even said that our whole nation would be doing the will of God if only it had purified its species and race. Deeds of the law on which to base a claim to God’s favor! Of course, Christ is to remain and faith is to remain — they are *also* to remain.

Dear brethren, that “also” is the devil, and against that “also” Luther must come forth — not only the man Luther and not only the human Luther spirit which may inspire us to make another wonderful law with which to justify ourselves, but the Luther whose pen was guided by the Holy Ghost when he wrote the little word “alone” — “through

faith alone." To be sure, the word does not exist in the original text. The philologist can prove that the translation here is faulty, and indeed Luther's opponents at Rome snorted with rage at this "falsification." But Luther adhered to the word and there it stands, and no power in the world will strike it out again.

This word tells us that God the Lord is an envious and jealous God who will tolerate no other gods or demigods beside him. In rejecting the deeds of the law he rejects every human claim to his favor. Many roads lead to Rome but only one road leads to God, and that road does not lead from us to God but from God to us; and it is called "Christ alone." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. I am the way, the truth and the life."

Thus we are referred to Holy Scripture as the Word of God which testifies to Christ alone. Thus we are referred to the grace of God, which becomes a certainty to us in Christ alone because in him the divine severity and the comforting pity of God meet in indivisible unity. Thus we are founded upon faith, yea, upon that faith alone which is no longer an opinion we have about God and which does not depend upon the nature of our ideas about God, but which rather receives the grace of God in Christ and puts its trust in that grace.

"See that Christ is preached in Germany!" Christ, and not deeds of the law; God's deeds and not our deeds. That preaching of Christ alone will decide whether Luther's spirit remains alive among us, whether his work still lives, whether there will continue to be a Protestant church in the future. For thus says Dr. Martin Luther: "Where this article is absent — the article of justification by faith alone — the church is absent and it is impossible to combat error." AMEN.



## THE SIFTING

*(Fourth Sunday before Easter, 1934)*

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. — *Luke 22:31-34*



In the life of Christendom there are long periods of silent development when it seems as though the kingdom of God were slowly and steadily ripening among us as the sown seed ripens for the harvest. This maturing process is of course not such that it must inevitably — as with the inward consistency of a natural law — result in a completely Christian world; but it is such that faith and unbelief dwell together in outward peace but in inward contention, in an invisible, silent and obstinate struggle for the place in the sun.

This is the situation described in the parable of the tares among the wheat; and it cannot be cleared up and eliminated by any Christian zeal, however honest and well meant that zeal may be. “Let both grow together until the harvest.” Anyone who becomes impatient and thinks he might hasten the development only manages at the most to found a new sect; but he can never prevent even the new sect from at once coming under that same law, because it is not given to us

to represent the fellowship of the faithful in pure and unalloyed form in this world and in our time.

But now and then in the course of the centuries this silent, steady development suddenly breaks off, without any interference from us; and when that happens it always looks as though the Last Day were at hand for Christendom. Then our ears are opened for the message of the supreme verities, then our eyes see God's judgment, for suddenly the field of our human desires and actions is and decisions are made which cannot be revoked. And the great question confronts us, whether the community of Jesus Christ is in earnest about following its Lord in tribulation and sorrow, or whether it is seeking to shirk this command. It is the same question that was put to the disciples when the Lord Jesus Christ was preparing for Gethsemane and Golgotha, the same question that runs through all the persecutions of the early Christians, the question put by God to our fathers in the days of the Reformation and the Counter Reformation: "Do you profess Christ or do you deny him?"

Unless all the signs deceive us, dear friends, such a time has dawned again, for all of us as a community of Christ, without contributory action on our part, are faced with this choice, and the danger is that in making it we may unintentionally create a schism.

Today we are already talking of the seriousness of the position of our church as if we took that seriousness to some extent as a matter of course. We have already grown accustomed to regarding the present crisis as a chronic and permanent condition. The result of this attitude is that we fail to appreciate the real crisis. It is not enough for us merely to acquiesce in some sort of verdict and say, "Everything is

sure to come right ” or, “ The catastrophe can no longer be averted.” We are not such disinterested spectators that we can be satisfied with bromides. We ourselves are being asked to which side we belong; and God is already taking care that we do not shirk the answer.

Our position is actually this: we have all of us — the whole church and the whole community — been thrown into the Tempter’s sieve, and he is shaking and the wind is blowing, and it must now become manifest whether we are wheat or chaff. Verily, a time of sifting has come upon us, and even the most indolent and peaceful among us must see that the calm of a meditative Christianity is at an end.

At first we may all have been conscious of a distinct feeling of relief that there was again and at last some life and movement in our church. But only too soon there was more life and movement than seemed good or necessary, and before long we began to suspect that it was not God at all who was shaking us awake, not his Holy Spirit that was blowing through us. For we received from the new awakening no new faith or new spiritual baptism, but were rather led into frightful errors and disorders; and all efforts to create light and peace were vain, and all the signs which seemed to foreshadow a new beginning came to nought.

This is not a springtime of hope and expectancy for the Christian church; it is testing time, and God is giving Satan liberty to shake us up so that it may be seen what manner of men we are.

We had dreamed of a new promise and we had thought that unforeseen possibilities for the work of the church were opening up before us — but the door has slammed shut, and



we are being called back to the way of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is still — and once again — the way of suffering.

Satan swings his sieve and Christianity is thrown hither and thither; and he who is not ready to suffer, he who called himself a Christian only because he hoped to gain something for his race and nation, is blown away like chaff by the wind of these times. We see it daily and our hearts grow heavy within us. One need only listen to and question those who — as we thought — had found their way back to the church and to its Lord: disillusionment set in long ago and is daily increasing. After all, what has Jesus of Nazareth, of whom men say that he is the Christ, really to offer us?

And yet I will not commit the error of painting everything black. When all is said and done, it cannot be denied that in the year which lies behind us many an honest confession of faith was made in word and in deed. And in spite of all the disappointments we have experienced, many men and women here and there in our church have really stood by their creed, even under difficulties. When all is said and done, that manly resoluteness which made Peter say, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death," has not yet died out among us. Many a silent hope has clung to it; many aspirations and prayers have been built upon it, more perhaps than for years; and we waited to see if we might be spared the test. But Satan swings his sieve and the sifting is not yet at an end.

"With thee," said Peter; and many a man has said and thought, "With thee." But before we can approach Christ we must rid ourselves of all that is at bottom only human courage, secret pride and self-confidence in a pious disguise.

God will not let us off with merely reaching out for a martyr's crown.

Peter would have stood his ground before the Sanhedrin and before the Roman governor, and would have made his confession of faith well and bravely; before the nameless maid-servant he had to deny his Master because his courage was not ready and his faith not so strong as he thought: "I know him not!"

Heroic Christianity, dear friends, is still humanly possible and can be achieved even without faith; but in the hour of trial and sifting it, too, is blown away like chaff. The Lord Jesus Christ did not fall upon the field of battle but was put to death upon the cross; he did not die as a martyr but as a criminal; he was not admired but despised.

We shudder at this way of the cross, and we have a terror, which no courage and no remedy can subdue, of contempt and ridicule. The prospect of facing them puts an end to our dreams of martyrdom and heroism, and finally the only prudent course seems to be to deny Christ. "One must do in Rome as the Romans do!"

We are now faced with the unequivocal question: What about our faith? And we see, as Peter saw, that faith needs something more than resolution and readiness to suffer and sacrifice; we see that faith is no unchangeable and inalienable possession, which we have, with which we calculate and on which we can rely. Peter thought it was, and this confidence proved his undoing; for behind his strong words there was only a weak faith. That is why Jesus said to him, "When thou art converted. . . ." For the disciple did not yet know what conversion really was; he had not realized what is really meant by faith.

The truth is that conversion and faith can be planted within us only by an act of God, and only God can cause them to remain effectual. This truth makes us humble, for it marks the limits of human capabilities and refers us to God. "Save me, O Lord, and I shall be saved," prays the prophet Jeremiah. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," the apostle reminds us. That is why Jesus makes intercession for the disciple who is so sure of his loyalty and whose fall he foresees so clearly. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

The stabilizing element in our faith does not lie within us. What keeps us from falling in the hour of temptation is not our own honesty and loyalty but God's loyalty which upholds us. The strength of every true confession of faith in Christ lies in the fact that it is nothing but our consent to what the Lord Jesus Christ does to us.

And so today we must let ourselves be told again that over the whole course of Jesus' life and Passion are written the words "for thee"; and we must take this thought to heart. Then shall we know for certain that God is not waiting for us to turn to him, but that he has long since turned to us and found us and encompassed us with his loyalty.

If we listen to that truth and cling to it this testing time cannot shake us and must only bind us all the more closely to the Lord to whom we belong and whom we acknowledge because he has acknowledged us and given his life for us. And only by listening to that truth will we make this time of sifting become a time of blessing for us. It is meant to lead us back to the source of faith and to the wellspring of strength.

AMEN.



## THE ANOINTING

*(Palm Sunday, 1934)*

Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him.

Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.

There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.

Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him,

Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.

For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.

— *John 11:57; 12:1-8*



Today we enter Holy Week, and this Sunday, like the coming days, should find us peculiarly silent, so that the eyes of our soul and the ears of our heart may be opened to the message of the Passion and death of the Lord Jesus Christ; for our knowledge of that Passion and death and our attempts to understand them are hopelessly inadequate, and end again and again in frightened helplessness. Our eye cannot penetrate the mystery and our thoughts cannot fathom its depths. And when past generations imagined that they had found a clue to the riddle, all their strenuous

efforts only showed more clearly than ever that such labor is vain and that the cross remains a foolishness and a stumbling block to the mind which broods upon it. We can to an extent agree with and follow the words and ways of Jesus; we can draw our morals and deduce our principles from them; but his sufferings are a barrier which we cannot cross and which we cannot break down. And here we get an inkling of what Luther means when he confesses in his Shorter Catechism: "I believe that it is not through my own reason or strength that I can believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him."

Not through my own reason or strength! This "not" may again be brought home to us by an examination of to-day's gospel lesson. What influences Judas here and what — as we read in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark — also finds an echo in the hearts of the other disciples, is in no wise deep-seated wickedness or blind hatred; it is only the voice of their own reason and of a perfectly normal human desire. Yes, it is precisely the voice of humanity which makes itself heard here: Is it not, indeed, better and more fitting to be sensible and help the poor with the three hundred pence than to squander the money in some useless demonstration? The answer is so self-evident that the question is superfluous. And who among us would be willing to declare that he was convinced by the strange words in which Jesus sides with Mary against the disciples? "The poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always" — surely these words are unsatisfactory. They obviously do not meet the real objection which is raised here. We do not understand why the one thing must exclude the other, if one looks at the matter sensibly.

Yes, perhaps it seems to us extremely hard — at least I am conscious of annoyance every time I read the passage — that the evangelist should so unhesitatingly ascribe impure motives to Judas and that he should, despite the latter's very sensible criticism, simply deny that Judas really cares about the poor whose cause he pleads. And though we may, on the strength of the evangelist's words, turn away from Judas and admit that he probably was an inferior character, it is not so easy to admit that his criticism was really unfounded and unreasonable.

That is why we feel that, through the rebuff which is meted out to Judas, we ourselves are somehow repulsed by Jesus and misunderstood in an honest desire which deserves to be taken seriously. We are even tempted to call Jesus as a witness against himself; for, after all, he himself has again and again given us to understand and has emphasized in his words and deeds, his parables and miracles, that we cannot serve God except in the neighbor whom he sets at our side or lays at our feet; that it is not enough to say "Lord, Lord!" but that we must do his will. Are things suddenly to be different now?

Obviously there is something wrong here. We stand before a locked door to which we have no key, on the edge of a chasm over which our reason and strength can build no bridge. It really seems as though the Lord Jesus Christ, while preparing for suffering and death, were relegating our humanity, our love of our neighbor and all that that implies, into the background as something of secondary importance. Such details no longer matter to him. Yes, how indifferent his words really sound — "The poor always ye have with you." Let us listen to these words quietly and seriously.



On the other hand, what Mary does, what with the best will in the world we can describe only as an exuberant outburst of emotion, Jesus not only accepts without demur, but expressly defends: "She hath wrought a good work upon me." He looks upon her action as an instance of the fulfillment of his gospel and bestows his promise upon it: "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

Again, we shall not get far in our efforts to understand this passage by merely summoning up friendly sympathy with this woman. We approve of her motives, but nevertheless what she does remains in our opinion unreasonable, a piece of foolish emotionalism. Once more we are inclined to call upon Jesus himself to bear witness against Mary's action—the Jesus, that is, who in incorruptible seriousness and perfect austerity set his face against all fanatical, overemotional worship on the part of his disciples and followers; the Jesus whose one and only concern was that his word not only should win a hearing and be respected, but that it should above all be obeyed. "Go and do thou likewise. . . . This do and thou shalt live."—Is all this suddenly to be changed? Is it worship of himself which he now demands? And to all appearances this personal worship cannot be great enough; for, "me ye have not always."

We can get out of these difficulties with comparative ease if we assume that when faced with the prospect of his death Jesus himself has become weak; for of course he knew what lay before him. But such an assumption only means referring the problem back to Jesus himself and thus shirking its solution. Furthermore, in making this assumption we go against psychology, because this would be the only time in the

whole course of his Passion and death that Jesus forgot his mission under the stress of humanly understandable self-pity. We are wiser to admit that here, too, we have reached the limit of our ability to understand the situation. "Not through my own reason or strength!" Jesus places himself in the center: "Me ye have not always." And so we will listen to these words, too, quietly and seriously.

And now it becomes clear to us that the dying Lord is not concerned with our good will and plans; he is not interested in having us deduce rules of conduct from his words and propose to act according to them. That may be all very well and may lead to all kinds of sensible and useful results; and it is certainly true that the Christianizing of the nations has been productive of all sorts of benefits — a fact which applies to our German nation too. But that does not prove from what teacher we take our principles of conduct. Today, for instance, an attempt to base the morals of our nation on something other than Christianity would naturally be a very difficult undertaking in view of our Christian past; but the possibility that such an attempt may be made cannot well be disputed, and it is not even certain whether we as a nation with Christian culture are really closer to the Lord Jesus Christ than we would be if our culture were built upon different principles.

For rather than with principles of conduct — and, as to that, Judas and the other disciples doubtless had "Christian" principles — Jesus is concerned with something else, namely, with the love which binds us personally to him. Lacking this bond all our "Christian" principles are but human, humane principles in a Christian garment; and lacking this bond all that we call love of neighbor, for in-

stance, is animated by motives similar to those of Judas, who in truth cared nothing for the poor but sought only his own advantage. — Yes, without this bond even our faith is a purely human affair — and I feel it particularly incumbent upon me to say today, when we are actually fighting a battle about and for our own faith, that we are fighting a vain and a human battle if we do not fight in the love of Christ and because of this personal bond with him.

Thus as Christians we have plenty of problems; but these problems are not to be solved through our own reason and strength. If we wish to solve them as Christians and in the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ we must do so through our union with him and out of love to him. This love is his work in us, the fruit of his Passion and death. Mary of Bethany was the first to see this love and to let herself be embraced by it, even before the sufferings of Christ had begun. That is why she has the place of honor before all others which Jesus assigned to her.

And if we, dear brethren, do not understand the meaning of the Passion and death of the Saviour, if our minds are baffled by them — no matter! If only we let ourselves be seized by them; if only we read and hear in them the words “for you”; if only we learn to believe in the love with which Christ loves us, so that we may be able to love him: that is enough on which to base our whole life.

Oh that in the midst of all the unrest and all the discord in the church we might have sufficient quietness during these days to allow us to hear this message of the cross!

AMEN.



# HE IS RISEN!

(*Easter, 1934*)

In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher.

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay:

And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his disciples word.

And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail! And they came and held him by the feet, and worshiped him.

Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

— *Matt. 28:1-10*



Once more we have made the pilgrimage from Bethlehem to Golgotha by way of Galilee, and in the course of it the earthly career of Jesus, as far as it is known to us from the Gospels, has passed before our eyes: that life outwardly spent in poverty and lowliness, beginning in a manger and ending on the cross, and yet inwardly filled with richness and with a sublimity before which not only his contemporaries but we today still stand in silent homage and adoration. For that life was and is all grace and truth. For that very reason, however, it brings our life into question and forces us to ask with agonized anxiety whether we have any right to live at

all — we whose lives are anything but grace and truth, we who live by selfishness and self-deception. It is no wonder that this Jesus ends upon the cross; indeed, that cross is the last, supreme attempt to turn aside judgment from us and to win back our human freedom.

But for us, how are we to continue to live our selfish lives if Jesus is right, if God lives and if he claims dominion over us? How are we to continue to live if it is not we who have the last word, but God? The answer is that it appears we cannot. That is why the life of this Jesus of Nazareth must be an episode; that is why he must die by the hand of man; that is why the story of his life must end with a full stop: “So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.”

It is necessary, dear friends, that we keep these human and historical facts before our eyes in order not to deprive the Christian Easter festival utterly of its spiritual significance; for to a great extent Easter has become to us only a symbol and an allegory of the victory of life over death, of light over darkness, of spring over winter — all beautiful and elevating ideas, to be sure, transmutable into mood and feeling; but no more than that! For a little reflection makes us complete the cycles by saying that after spring comes autumn, after the light comes darkness, and ultimately after life comes death. And with that we are where we began.

On that first Easter morning no joyous bells rang out to an astonished humanity the news of life's victory over death. What happened then brought fear and alarm upon men, and by no means only upon the keepers of the tomb who “for fear did shake and became as dead men.” The Easter terror is universal, because it is of vital interest to the whole world

that Jesus should be dead and that the full stop which we wrote on Good Friday after his life should remain. The stone must stay before the tomb so that we may have peace. We will gladly tend and care for the sepulcher; we will gladly mourn and revere the dead man, and perhaps even lament the tragic fact that he was too good and too great for us to be able to bear him. Only he must leave us in peace; he must not ask us to hear, in his words and deeds, in his sufferings and death, the voice of the living God calling us to a sense of our responsibility. That is the reason for the stone, that is the reason for the full stop after his life and work.

But Easter begins with the earthquake; the angel of the Lord rolls away the stone from the door of the sepulcher and seats himself upon it. We do not have the last word; the full stop with which we try to create peace for ourselves becomes a question mark: "Now what about the man who was put to death upon the cross?" The question remains open, for his tomb stands open — and all the answers which we try to give are empty and devoid of meaning, for his tomb is empty.

Here we are at the end of all our resources; here one thing becomes obvious: that our last word is no last word and we cannot possibly escape from the living God! The Easter story remains full of obscurities; all human speculation and thought have come to grief over it and will always come to grief over it. The resurrection of Jesus is not what we call a historical fact. It can be neither proved nor refuted by any method of historical research. What remains is the empty tomb, is the fact that the dead man who lay in that tomb gives us no peace, that we are haunted by the knowledge



that Good Friday, as a human effort and as an attempt to get rid of Jesus of Nazareth, was a futile venture.

This is anything but a message of "glad tidings to all men." This is an earthquake sent by God, which shatters the last remnants of our human security and opens before us a yawning void. The empty tomb and the stone which was rolled away put an end to all piously happy, romantic notions of Easter. Here we are told plainly, "Make no mistake: it is the living God who speaks the last word!"

And yet, though it is no message of "glad tidings to all men," Easter *is* good news. Indeed, it is in the true sense of the word the good news which is the central point of all Christian teaching. We need only glance at the Acts of the Apostles to see that all the preaching of the disciples culminates in this testimony: God has raised from the dead that same Jesus who died on the cross on Good Friday, and has made him Lord and Christ.

And this message reveals the division in men's minds. That is not to say, of course, that the separation takes place here first of all. The risen Christ does not face the world saying, "Do you want me or not?" His cross stands before the world, and it is there that we must decide whether we, guilty and condemned sinners, confess our faith in Christ, acknowledging the supremacy of God's truth and desiring to live by his grace. Before the world lies the empty tomb, mutely asking us whether we are ready to let God have the last word. He who wishes to have the last word himself, he who thinks that he has got rid of the crucified Christ, must barricade himself against the message of Easter. But he who stands silent before the cross of Christ, he who knows or suspects that he, as one of humanity, has been condemned

by God and who because of that knowledge cannot part from the crucified Saviour, will hear the words, "He is risen," as truly a message of joy.

Thus it was with the two women in our gospel: "I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified!" Thus it was with the disciples. Thus it is with us. No one can be happy in the certainty of the risen Christ unless his heart has been won by the crucified Jesus.

The risen Christ is no historical personality with regard to whom, after careful consideration of the facts, we can make a positive affirmation or denial; he is entirely removed from the sphere of all human and practical methods of research. Since Easter he has been called the Lord and since Easter he has been the Lord. Whether he comes out of his seclusion and where he does so is entirely his affair; but as the Lord of faith he comes only to those who believe in him as their Lord or who would like to believe in him. And his coming means joy and comfort, and his greeting is "Peace be unto you!" and "Be not afraid!" For the fact that he is risen and lives means that God has frustrated our human action of Good Friday; the crucified Christ died for us, and God has accepted his sacrifice. So now there is a truly happy message: "Christ was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." We are at peace with God; for God himself has spoken the last word.

This is, to be sure, something quite different from the familiar Easter joy which is at bottom based only upon the fact that our soul moves in harmony with the rhythm of nature, which surrounds us and permeates our being. This deeper religious joy is born amid the sorrows of Good Friday and it can never deny the fact and the circumstances of its

birth. But once we understand, it is “with fear and great joy” — *with fear*, for here we have to do with the living, holy God, in whose sight no one is guiltless; but also *with great joy*, for here we encounter the living, gracious Lord — the crucified and risen Christ — and we can put our trust in him! . . .

The most beautiful, laughing spring day suddenly becomes sad and dreary to us when the clouds of sorrow and grief darken its sky. And if we have nothing else to depress us on this Easter day, we need only think about the fate of our Protestant church and our Protestant community to lose all our natural Easter joy. Or shall we try to comfort ourselves by saying that things will surely change for the better? We could easily be mistaken about that, and then indeed we might suffer shipwreck.

There is a better Easter comfort for us as Christians and as a Christian community, a comfort which will never fail. It is this: “He is risen!” “Christ lives!” On the strength of that comfort we can face life boldly; on the strength of that comfort we can fold our hands and lay all our sorrow and distress upon the living Lord, and then even the dreariest day and the darkest night must become bright and clear, and we shall say — with fear, it is true, but with great joy: “He is risen! The sun that sheds its rays upon me is Jesus Christ, my Lord!”

AMEN.



# BROTHERLY LOVE VERSUS HATRED OF THE WORLD

*(June, 1934)*

Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

— *I John 3:13-18*



At the close of the story of Pentecost we are told of the members of the first Christian fellowship that “they had favor with all the people.” That reads like an idyll and falls sweetly on our ear. It probably pleased the young church too, for who would not like to go his way in undisturbed peace? Surely we have plenty of other cares and troubles and sufferings to vex and burden us. And we — the Christian community of today — feel with grief and pain that this peace has been taken from us, and again and again we learn the real and inward meaning of that plea from the old church prayer in which we ask to be allowed to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”

We must, then, get used to the idea that a state of affairs

which we long regarded as natural and right no longer exists. We cannot help being surprised that at the very moment when we had hoped for a new, closer union between the nation and the church large numbers of people turn determinedly away — not because of indifference or defective knowledge, but in conscious refusal of the Christian message and in deliberate opposition to the fellowship of the church. Here we unexpectedly come upon a yawning abyss the existence of which we had never suspected; here a chasm suddenly gapes striking terror into our hearts. We were accustomed to view the church and the nation as one. Even the last fifteen years had not changed that view, for he who left the church at the same time left his nation, and he who found his way back to his nation as a rule found his way back to the church also. And so what we really had was an inclusive church with manifold shades of difference; but nowhere was there a fixed boundary, nowhere was there an unbridgeable gulf. Outside there were only the freethinkers, but in separating themselves from God they had also severed themselves from the nation.

Today we face an entirely different situation: church and nation can and indeed dare no longer be regarded as one. Through the whole nation runs the dividing trench, with the Christian community on one side and on the other — the “world.” And the side to which the individual belongs is no longer determined — as it was up till now — by his attitude toward his nation; it is determined only by the Lord Jesus Christ and by our attitude toward him. Even the fact that we are in the “church” does not exempt us from this decision; for the rift runs even through this church; the world and the Christian community are parting

company even in the church. No one really wanted it but nobody is able to prevent it. . . .

When it happens — as it did recently in our neighborhood — that members of the church attend divine service in order deliberately to leave the room very noisily during the reading of the scripture lesson and insult the preacher in the open street after the service, then the rift as it touches the church itself is merely becoming visible. And when we are surprised and alarmed at similar outbreaks of elemental hatred as at something which ought not to be and should not be allowed to be, then the apostle bids us regard them as absolutely normal and in no way surprising: “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you!”

In other words, we must radically and systematically change our ideas concerning the relation of the fellowship of Jesus to the world — to the world within the nation and to the world within the church. The time of the mythical peace between the world and the Christian fellowship is coming to an end, and the lull will be followed by a great storm.

I do not stand here as a prophet, dear brethren, or I should perhaps be obliged to paint a dark picture of the future — distress and tribulation coming upon the fellowship of Christ, lukewarmness and defection in our ranks, with only a few of our number managing to save their bare life and their bare faith. But I am no prophet; I can only pray that the Lord Jesus Christ will so guide us that the prince of this world may not suddenly come upon us from behind and destroy us while we are yet unprepared. But though I may not be a prophet, I have been appointed your guardian and



shepherd, with the duty of seeing the danger and openly warning you of it and showing you the way to safety; and I see the danger and woe unto me if I should say to you, "Peace, peace!" For it is no peace; it is the world letting fall its Christian mask, it is the wolf casting off its sheep's clothing in order to fall upon the flock. It means that we must again take the word of the Lord Jesus Christ very seriously, as addressed to us: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." And along with these words we have that other saying to keep us from blinding ourselves with vain illusions: "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."

The fellowship of Jesus has no promise that it will ever be in the majority; we must indeed guard against thinking that there can ever be any kind of human security or assurance against the world's hatred. All parleys, all truces, all peace treaties are unreal, for the world must hate the Christian fellowship; and because the fellowship, so long as it is a Christian fellowship, cannot hate, it must suffer at the hands of the world. We must learn this fact anew today, we must accept it anew today, without embellishment and without compromise. "Marvel not, my brethren!"

And now, dear friends, I hear the objection that rises in our hearts and protests that we do not like such mournful Christianity, and that such a sour-tempered and sanctimonious religion is repugnant to our inmost souls. Quite right; but does the Passion hymn of the fellowship sound mournful or sanctimonious, that hymn which we sang a little while ago: "Praise God cheerfully with song, exult, thou Christian host"? Do we not hear in it the rhythm of a march-

ing army which is certain of victory? Yea, certain of victory; for "we know that we have passed from death unto life"!

The thought of facing the hatred of the world may be unpleasant; it may depress and vex us; it may insult us; and yet the motto of the community of Jesus is: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." It is indeed a conquered world which seeks to terrify us; it is indeed a condemned and dying hatred which attacks us. And we are already out of the kingdom of death, for we know of the love which gave up its life for us and suffered death for our sakes.

We are therefore the fellowship of the elect, who have come from death into life; we are still in the world but no longer of it if we have heard the call of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Follow me," if we have recognized "the love, that he laid down his life for us." What can the deadly hatred of a dying world signify in the face of the eternal love of the living Lord which upholds and supports us? Then a Paul rejoices: "I am certain that neither death nor life . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!" Then a Johann Franck boasts amid the misery of the 'Thirty Years' War: "Rage, world, and burst asunder; I stand here and sing in safe and sure keeping!"

No, dear brethren, there is no truth in the idea that Christianity is mournful; and particularly in suffering, particularly when confronted with the hatred of the world, faith will make men strong and glad and reliant: "We know that we have passed from death unto life."

This is assuredly no dead knowledge, but a living certainty; no mere conviction which we adopt once and for all, but a realization that transforms our way of life to one of action and love. Therefore, though it is true that our faith must be born in solitude with the Lord Jesus Christ and that it ever receives its strength from him only, it is only in the Christian community, in intercourse with the brethren, that we know for certain that our faith is more than an idea, that it is life, effective and creative life, and that we know for certain that we have truly passed from death unto life. Here the love of the one Lord proves a living force — a force of love which emanates from us and which upholds us. There is a great deal of talk about love; but the most beautiful words can be empty and meaningless, however correct and well intentioned they may be. Love is really action and truth, or it does not exist at all; and the talk about universal love of mankind and about Christian love of one's neighbor has had only one result — it has brought to light the deplorable lack of any kind of love in the world.

Perhaps, however, the blessing of this time, when we have to bear the hatred of the world in common, lies precisely in the fact that brotherly Christian love, and with it the joyful certainty of our faith, is to be given us anew. I know that this brotherly love is again awake in many places, and I believe that ten days ago, at the first German Confessional Synod at Barmen, I stood in the midst of a broad, deep and living stream of such love; and I feel sure that that meeting was a gift to all of us who were able to be present, because it strengthened us in faith and gave us courage to make difficult decisions; above all, because it enabled us firmly and clearly to take our stand on the action of the church



of the world in severing itself from the community of those who believe in Christ and profess their faith in him. We certainly did not do so because we thought ourselves better than other people. Christ's church must take the low road, the road of suffering and being hated. We have, however, not set out upon this road with illusions, but in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore without faltering, because "we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren."

And therefore I ask you, dear brethren, for more than your sympathy, for more than your monetary help, on behalf of the church of Christ. We live by the fact that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Love! My brethren, "let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth"! AMEN.

## LOOK ON US!

(June, 1934)

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. — *Acts 3:1-8*



We men and women generally judge the question, "What is the good of believing in God?" from the standpoint of our particular needs at any given time; and thus it is very easy to see why we make extremely varied demands upon the church as the guardian of our religious possessions. It is only natural for us to expect comfort from it in days of mourning, and in moments of gladness a consecration which will make our joy more lasting. When we become conscious of the misery of our existence we desire help, and when we see ourselves faced with great tasks we ask for light and strength. And who could blame us for so doing?

Just as this is true of small and individual matters so is it true of our affairs as a whole; in every human life there

is formed, in the course of the years, a definite kind of piety, and every nation and every period bears its characteristic religious stamp. Thus it happens quite automatically that the Christian church and its message, its congregations and its servants are at different times assessed at different values, and that they are always being faced anew with the question of whether and how far they will yield to the wishes and demands, the hopes and expectations which are brought to them.

It is true of all of us, dear brethren, and it cannot be otherwise, that our attitude toward the church is absolutely and conclusively decided by whether and in what measure the church can satisfy our yearning and help our distress.

I therefore do not doubt that that lame man who had himself carried daily to the "gate of the temple which was called Beautiful" was wholeheartedly satisfied with the religion of his nation and with the practical nature of its church. The difficult lot which he had had to bear from birth and which, in the four decades of his life, he had come to accept as his unalterable fate, prevented him from shaping his existence by his own strength. It was particularly fortunate for him that the religion of his people strongly emphasized and kept alive a sense of responsibility for the distress and misery of the helpless. And though as a receiver of alms he sat *before* the gate of the temple, and though the prayers of the faithful and their hymns reached his ear only as a murmur, his interests were looked after; he participated in the part of the church service which, from his point of view, must have been the real and most important part. With good reason and with comprehensible obstinacy he would have resisted any propaganda against the temple and its reli-



gion, from the very knowledge that for his life at least this whole institution represented something of real and tangible value.

Is that which binds us to the church and keeps us in the church really something fundamentally different, or is it not also and solely the fact that we find and hope to continue to find here something which fills the gap in our lives and lightens our burden? Is it not the wish for some sort of alms after we have resignedly accepted the real infirmity of our lives? When I say that, I am not even thinking first and foremost of the hundreds of thousands who have hitherto had recourse to the church as a welfare organization, desiring its help in their poverty and sickness. I am thinking rather of the millions to whom it has once meant an hour of spiritual elevation and inward reflection — to whom it has meant a little consecration and solemnity, a little silence and peace.

And today when the existence of the Protestant church is at stake, today when countless such beggars are once more presenting themselves in the hope of being given something because they perceive their poverty and because they cannot but fear that soon it may be no longer possible to receive anything here — we, as servants and members of the church, are obliged to confess, as did the two apostles of old, that we are not in a position to fulfill such wishes and expectations. “Look on us — Silver and gold have we none!”

Truly our church has become quite poor — and I am not speaking primarily of physical possessions, although we lack these, too — but we have become so poor that we can no longer make anyone a present from an accumulated surplus of spiritual strength and inward wealth. We are simply no

longer able to create beautiful divine services and edifying hours of devotion from the riches of a peace-filled heart; we have neither time nor peace to work out spirited sermons or what used to be called so. We are again quite poor and wretched men, just as Jesus' disciples and apostles were, and anyone who believes that we could do anything for him or give him anything is wrong.

At first glance the situation may seem to us all to be a real misfortune; and I must confess that we pastors today feel something of the external oppression and the inward vexation under which Paul, for instance, had to carry on his work, as we learn when he writes how often he has been in danger among the false brethren. And as a Christian congregation we are beginning to understand how little we belong to those who walk upon the heights among humanity. All who would like to receive alms from us, all who look to us to fulfill their hopes and desires because they think we could perhaps give them something from our spiritual surplus—all these will turn away disappointed when they see how poor we are and how we ourselves must struggle for our bare life.

A misfortune? —Certainly, humanly speaking, all that we as a church and as a Christian community are passing through today is a misfortune, an unsparing revelation of our helplessness and weakness. And yet it is no misfortune, but God's gift and God's strength, if in the midst of such human failure we dare to speak the word of faith, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." That is the only thing which is left us, but it is also the only thing which should be left us.

We are now no longer concerned with hearing about

Christianity and its advantages and blessings. We have no time to draw conclusions from Jesus' work and sufferings — for instance, how to shape our own work and bear our own sufferings. It is no longer a matter of good principles and pious thoughts, and certainly not of alms with which we may maintain our crippled existence for a time. But the one great question, on the answer to which hang life and death, is whether we can believe and whether we can put the greatest trust of which we are capable in the fact that the name Jesus Christ of Nazareth is more than the name of the founder of the Christian religion and more than the name of a man on whom we should model our lives; whether that name covers the identity of the living and active Lord by whose hand all our sorrow and all our distress are changed into strength and life; whether we can rely upon the fact that this same Jesus of Nazareth whom we know and of whom we know, is our Lord who knows us and who knows of us, and our Saviour who understands the full depths of our distress and heals all our infirmities.

That is the question with which we are faced. It does not, however, come as a question to us, but as a word that demands faith and obedience: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk!"

It is easy to take alms. It needed no effort to accept what Christianity gave us as alms — elevating words and edifying thoughts — if we felt so inclined; the hands of our soul stretched out to receive them. But what is offered us here is more than we can grasp. We are to walk, we who have been lame since birth and have never yet borne our own weight. Our life is to be based upon a new and firm foundation, and yet all we know from our own experience is that



the foundation of our life and of our Christian trust in God is bursting asunder like ice floes cracking under a thaw, and that the only possible new foundation is "the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth."

Shall we say, "Impossible!" or dare we trust that name? Peter took the lame man by the hand and helped him to believe. Jesus Christ himself takes us by the hand and leads us to his table so that we may there taste of his love and see how good the Lord is, so that we may there learn to believe in his real, active and living presence.

And so in conclusion, dear brethren, today I have a request to make of you. We all need new strength and new assurance of faith; we need them all the more the greater becomes the distress which surrounds and oppresses us as a Christian community. The Lord Jesus Christ has given us a watchword and a sacrament to keep us beside him in the right faith. Therefore let us, as a church which professes to believe in Christ, hold fast to his word and to his sacrament, so that from out of the midst of the distress of these days there may be heard the song of praise of those who know the Saviour and have been helped by him. May God help us to do so!

AMEN.

# THE STILLING OF THE TEMPEST

(*September 23, 1934*)

And when he was entered into a ship his disciples followed him.

And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

And his disciples came to him and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

— *Matt. 8:23-27*



“And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.”

That is the text given for today in the brethren's little book of daily texts; and this quotation from the Scriptures casts illumination upon the events of today. The storm has broken, and if we have thought that the church of Christ was something in the nature of an island of the blest or a sanctuary of peace amid the raging sea of the times, the fanciful nature of such beliefs is now being brought home to us with unparalleled force.

Our forefathers had a deep-rooted reason for speaking of the “ship of the church.” They took this story from the gospel to mean that to follow Jesus must straightway lead us into storm and stress, not only in the case of the individual but of us all as his community and church. “Thus it is,” says Luther; “if Christ enters the ship the weather will not long remain calm, but a storm and tempest will arise.”

That is why a church which lives in peace and quiet with the rest of the world has every reason to investigate whether the Lord Jesus Christ is with it in the ship. That of course is not to say that every storm that comes upon us is proof that Christ is with us. Rather must we ask ourselves today whether we have ridden into this tempest of our own accord or whether we have ventured forth on God's journey as did the disciples: "He entered into the ship and his disciples followed him." Does the peril which terrorizes us perhaps arise after all from the fact that we have wished to do something for ourselves, that we have run after our own ideas and plans, our own desires and dreams, instead of asking what Jesus wished us to do? Have we, perchance, trusting to our own knowledge and ability pursued an ecclesiastical policy while keeping human, all too human, ideals before our eyes? If we have, surely it is time to alter the ship's course and try to get back as quickly as possible to the harbor which we left. And today a thousand voices bid us go back.

Now we certainly cannot deny that in the course of the events and conflicts in which we have been involved for more than a year much self-assurance and self-confidence have come to light and have been active. As long as it did not seem too bad or too dangerous, we have often — and I make no exception of myself in this matter — tested and hardened our strength on the growing demands which have been made upon it; and there may have been some human pride and arrogance mixed with this exhilaration. Probably it was the same in the case of Jesus' disciples so long as they thought that they, with their own strength, were able to cope with the elements.



But that feeling of confidence is now a thing of the past; we are no longer concerned with the question of possible means of escape, or of any "means" whatever. What does concern us now is the responsibility, that is, the question of whether we were following Jesus when we embarked upon this stormy voyage or whether we set out of our own accord on a lighthearted adventure in which ship and crew are now perishing. The question may well depress and discourage us. And when we recollect all that we have overlooked and neglected, all that we have left undone through fear or waywardness, accusing and tempting voices cry out within us, "We can do no more: we perish!" And then we face the disturbing problem: "What if it were to turn out that the Lord Jesus had not been in favor of this trip? And why should we think he was in favor of it?"

And so, dear friends, we grow lukewarm and languorous. Have we done right? Why not be content with what we have and with what no one takes away from us? No one interfered with our believing in Christ and comforting ourselves with his grace and leaving everything else to God's guidance. What is the use, then, of all this fighting for the church? Now the storm has arisen and shipwreck can no longer be averted.

But the Lord Jesus Christ sleeps and is unmoved by our conflict and by the storm — yes, he is unaffected by it. For what do problems of external organization matter to him? These things have nothing at all to do with faith in him — and it is with faith that he is concerned. These are worldly matters — but he leaves all worldly matters to those whose business they are.

It does not sound evil and yet it is the voice of the tempter

which whispers that we dare hope for no help from the Lord Jesus Christ for the church in such a time of trial! Did he really say, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"? Has he who came to save sinners really time and inclination for our church troubles? Are not all such problems included in his saying, "Who hath made me a judge or a divider over you?" And so the soft voices murmur and whisper, entice and woo, when the storm dies down for a moment before breaking out with renewed violence: "I will have you know that I draw conclusions as relentlessly as necessity dictates. Anyone who refuses to be silent and step aside I must force to do so." And we stand there powerless and see no way of escape. "We perish!" The storm which rages around us, the shipwreck of the church with which we are faced, these strike terror to our human hearts and make us forget belief to see nothing but the danger and our own inability to banish it.

The disciples had exactly the same experience, dear brethren. As fishermen they were expert boatmen, and it was their human and earthly duty to steer the ship and cope with the storm. What did their troubles matter to the man who lay sleeping in their midst? What concern of his was it if they failed in their duty? After all, he was not there to help them out of the difficulties of their calling and show them, the experienced seamen, a way to safety. To be sure, he was the Master and they were the disciples; but they were not concerned with that at the moment, but with the fact that their nautical skill could do no more and their boat was sinking. Then, in their terror which saw no hope of rescue, they wakened the sleeping passenger: "Lord, save us, we perish!"



“Men of little faith” Jesus called them because their terror was so great and despair was so near, because they themselves did not fully believe in the help for which they cried. He hearkened to that cry and heard in it the faith, the “little faith” which was wrestling with death and which clung to him as a last hope. He responded to that frightened cry of distress in a way that transcended their pleading and their understanding, and proved to this “little faith” that he was the Lord whom even wind and sea must obey.

We are in a similarly desperate position. We are like these fishermen in that our distress is at its height and all that this or that individual proposes is the counsel of absolute perplexity and despair: secession, free church, return to Rome, toleration of unchristian tyranny or whatever it may be—at bottom it is all nothing but a jumping overboard and a faithless acceptance of the inevitable shipwreck.

But it must not be so! For is the Lord Jesus Christ not with us in the ship? Since this voyage began, we have felt and been aware of his presence on many a cherished occasion and his word has been near us and has strengthened us. Do we no longer trust in him just because the storm has grown to a hurricane and he is asleep? Yes, he sleeps and acts as though he were not interested in the distress of his followers; yes, he acts as though we must manage for ourselves or perish.

Why does he do this? In the first place, assuredly, so that we may end by seeing clearly that it is not we who rule the storm. Plenty of people have endeavored to find a way of escape. There have even been men foolish enough to order peace and quiet for the church; but mere orders



cannot stop a storm. And it is good and salutary for us to be brought to the limits of our human power, and for the pride and arrogance which imagine they can usurp God's rule to be replaced by a genuine humility which bows obediently to the will of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ sleeps so that we may really be shown our limitations. And he sleeps so that it may at last be seen whether we have acquired at least the beginning of a faith which turns from despair to him. Things are now becoming serious so that we may at last act seriously. We must not be content with seeing in him the Master from whom we as disciples learn what he says to us and what example he sets us in his life; we must flee to him as our Lord and wake him: "Lord, save us; we can do no more; we perish!"

If that recourse to the Lord is indeed the fruit of our distress and despair and terror, dear friends, then blessed be all our distress and despair, blessed be all our terror! For he is the Lord whom heaven and earth must obey, and at the same time he is the Lord who listens to the anguished cry of faith, however little and weak this faith may be. He can help where we can no longer even hope.

Therefore let us today look not upon the tempest and the raging sea and not upon the nutshell of a vessel which is called the church, whose spars are now bursting asunder, but let us look only upon him who is called the Lord and who is the Lord. He is asleep? Oh no, he is only waiting to help us, he is only waiting for us to wake him; for his eyes are open unto faith, and his ear attends unto prayer. And we shall yet learn the truth of the hymn: "It will surprise you what the Lord will do." Lord, save us! AMEN.

## THE FATHER'S WILL

(October, 1934)

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching. . . .

And Jesus answered and said unto them: . . .

But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard.

He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented and went.

And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not.

Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him. — *Matt. 21:23, 24, 28-32*



Last Sunday we held a service of intercession for the persecuted Protestants in Würtemberg. In the interval things there have not improved a whit. The lawful bishop of the province has been deposed by an unlawful and unchristian synod. He and his fellow workers have been deprived, with the aid of secular authority, of their personal liberty and have been forbidden to act in an official capacity. The oppression which lies over the community of the faithful continues in undiminished force. We are already receiving new reports of the violent attack of the anti-Christian forces on the church in Bavaria; there, too, a reign of terror is being set up, while the public is being misled by lies and half-truths. The bishop of Bavaria also has been deposed and robbed of

his personal freedom, and that so-called "union" which is destroying a church already united in creed and constitution has been carried out with the assistance of temporal power against the unanimous will of the Protestant community.

It is dreadful and infuriating to see a few unprincipled men who call themselves "church government" destroy the church and persecute the fellowship of Jesus; the hour of Gethsemane has struck, and the truth of the words, "This is your hour and the power of darkness!" is again being demonstrated. It is the hour when a single Peter, perhaps, seizes his sword and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant; but at its conclusion the disciples flee terrified into the night, into the darkness of perplexity and bitterness of soul. The end is drawing nigh.

What hopes we had for the work of the Protestant church in our newly united nation! As the young men of Emmaus said, "We trusted that it had been he that should have redeemed Israel." Did not we also trust that the message of Jesus Christ would crown the labor of these years? Now, however, the bitterness of disappointed hope surges over us like a mighty stream; and again we have the old story: men with swords and staves, the secret betrayal and the treacherous kiss, calumnation and false witness, temporal and ecclesiastical judgment and the cross. Then we no longer understand God's ways and see nothing before us but darkness and death.

I admit that it is very natural, dear friends, that in our impotence we should rebuke the traitor or traitors, should sever ourselves sharply and clearly from them and condemn them. Nor is anything else possible. It must be so, and



we cannot dissociate ourselves strongly enough or plainly enough from what is happening today in the church. But there is a danger connected with this action, and that danger grows from day to day. It is we who today have to represent the claim of the Lord Jesus Christ on the church. We have to make known his command that no other will save. He alone must be recognized in the Christian community, and woe to us if we should say, "I will not!" Then indeed we should incur the penalty referred to in his words: "Whoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

Very well, then. We will profess our faith in him and not deny him; we will have Christ and no other to be the Lord; we sincerely and earnestly hope that his will may be done on earth as in heaven. And now we see day by day how injustice and violence are being perpetrated in his name, how the spirit of deceit and calumny stalks abroad and holds sway, and we rebel in legitimate wrath and with growing passion. We have enough to do to protest against all the attacks on the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ; in the end we cannot get away from this attitude of protest and defensive struggle. The Lord Jesus Christ commands, and many are the voices that call out a refusal to his orders. "But you must not say *no* to him; you must say *yes* and obey him; he is the Lord, and no other can be!" — thus we call and plead and cry to those who refuse, in our anxiety for the church, in our anxiety for our nation.

Do we see the danger? Or do we fail to notice how personal desire, personal passion, personal pride are more and more flowing into our creed; how our pious self-confidence is crowding out our faith; how our need of recompense is

driving out love; how the human aims for which we strive are pushing Christian hope aside? The danger lies in the fact that we profess faith in Christ. We accept Christ's sovereignty — but we are scarcely conscious that we are only *saying* we accept, while in reality we are fighting more and more passionately for our own honor, for our own ideas, our own rights and our own plans. All at once we stand where stood the high priests and elders with whom Jesus had to deal — “I go, sir; and went not.”

The great temptation in this hour of darkness is to lose sight of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, to let our confession of faith degenerate into a conflict between those who accept and those who refuse. But the real and ultimate issue is in the meantime pushed more and more into the background and forgotten.

It is certain that in the story told in our gospel lesson Jesus does not mean to commend in any way those who refuse to do their Father's bidding. Rather he wishes to rid those who agree of the great and dangerous delusion that merely by agreeing they have already fulfilled the will of the Father.

And so today we are called to reflection. The fact that we as a confessional church accept the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ obliges us, and us in particular, to render real obedience to his will. We must guard anxiously against remaining content with our acceptance and imagining that we cannot now go wrong, that we are on the right road and that our goal is certain. Pious self-righteousness has just as little promise of reaching its aim as any other self-made road chosen by unrepentant man. We must not pride ourselves on the fact that we are fighting for the truth; rather must we see that we ourselves bow humbly and obediently

to God's truth, lest, to quote Paul's words, "when we have preached to others we are ourselves cast away." That is why we in the confessional church need to do nothing so much as to pay new heed to the word of God, which is meant for us personally: "Thou art the man!" We must pay new heed to the hearing of the word, the hearing which becomes obedience to the word.

That is precisely the other side in this struggle which we are appointed to carry on: God is calling the devout, the true Christians to repentance; he wishes to open our eyes to what we have neglected and left undone in spite of all our well meant promises to do his bidding. Would this attack of an unchristian world on the prerogatives of the church have been even conceivable if we had really done our Christian duty? Are the experiences through which we are passing actually only a quarrel which is being forced upon us who are innocent, or are they a punishment inflicted by God on a Christian world which had become indifferent and lazy, rich and complacent? And who among us dare exonerate himself from the common guilt?

Satan has a right — and he has this right from God whom he, too, must serve — to harass and torment us. We cannot simply overlook the accusations which he levels against us. Our church was dull and lukewarm and dead. And how was it in our personal lives? Did all our fear and love really belong to God or to Mammon; did we live for our neighbor or for ourselves and our own concerns; did we hope for the coming of God's kingdom or for the achievement of our own prosperity? And how is it in these matters now? . . .

Dear brethren, we cannot fight Satan by letting him do



as he likes with us; we cannot stand up for the sovereignty of God in the church and in our nation as long as we ourselves withdraw from that sovereignty. It is not enough to promise to do God's bidding if at the same time we are like the son who said, "Sir, I go," and went not. The whole fight for the church becomes an empty squabble and embittered grumbling unless it is carried on by a community which is repentant and can therefore act from faith and in obedience.

God does not need us to build his kingdom; he has other ways of doing that. He does it with the publicans and harlots when they hear the call to repentance and are converted—and all his tables are filled. And he can use us only when we bow to his judgment and no longer try to enforce what we call our "good right," as we should like to do again and again. We shall not have a really good conscience in the suffering and strife of these days until we have humbled ourselves before God in the knowledge of our own guilt and sins of omission, and until we have received from his forgiveness the strength of a new obedience which seeks to do his will and command alone.

Repentance: heart-searching and conversion. However strange it may sound, that is the Lord's call to us in this conflict, so that we may not carry on the struggle as our own cause in lighthearted self-confidence, while talking of professing and confessing our faith in him. Now, amid the satanic temptations of this period of persecution, we can less than at any time dispense with going quietly apart and mercilessly submitting our own will and our own passion to the will, the jurisdiction of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then, under his guidance, making a new beginning in faith,

in obedience to his word and in the confidence that he himself will carry on his cause.

Rebirth in the Lord does not end the struggle, nor does it cause the suffering to be taken from us; we may even have to fight much harder than ever, and it may be that only then will we really begin to suffer. Obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ means, once and for all, fighting and suffering. But when the unhappy dissension between consenting to do God's will and not doing it has been overcome in the strength of forgiveness received, when lip service is replaced by the service of action and life, then though the battle still rages we are removed from the strife, and in the midst of suffering we are lifted out of distress. Where repentance and faith are there is the kingdom of heaven, there we have peace with God, there we can joyfully say, "We glory in tribulations also." Therefore let us ask God for a penitent and obedient heart: "Do thou cover up the days of my life that are past and guide me in the days that are yet to come, O Lord!"

AMEN.

## UNLESS YE REPENT. . . .

*(Day of Penance, 1934)*

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?

I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.

Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon and found none.

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

— *Luke 13:1-9*



Dear fellow penitents, we could shrug our shoulders and lightheartedly refuse to listen to any suggestion that we take the first half of this gospel lesson seriously. Obviously Jesus is here attacking an old Jewish popular belief or superstition which has long ceased to interest us.

When an accident occurs we do not think of inquiring into the guilt of those who have been injured in it. But to the pious Jew of Christ's time that was a grave and inevitable question. He recovered his inward equilibrium only after he had cleared up the matter of guilt, for to him that was the answer to the question: "Why? Why did God, who is



just, do that?" But we no longer ask this question; as a rule we are satisfied when we know the relations and causes — when we know that things had to happen thus.

That, however, is far from saying that we have made progress, for we are by no means sure about that old question of guilt; only with us it does not crop up at every moment and in each everyday event. The lightning must strike in our immediate neighborhood if we are to hear the thunder which follows it as the voice of God, or our attention must be particularly directed in some other way to the fact that in what is happening we may possibly be dealing with God himself.

If we are today, in the midst of the events of these last weeks and days, in the midst of the judgment which is being passed on our Protestant church, holding a day of penance, then the question of guilt — which is the question whether God's judgment is being expressed in these events — is surely coming to life.

Today and here I need not speak particularly of the disaster which has occurred. It is as plain to our eyes as was Pilate's brutal act or the fall of the tower of Siloam to the eyes of Jesus' contemporaries. And because it is the church which is concerned, because it is obvious that violence was here used against the church, and that the tower of the church threatens to fall — if it has not already fallen — our generation is inclined to think that we are witnessing and experiencing a clear, unmistakable instance of God's judgment. Consequently we are also likely to draw our conclusions, to talk of guilt and to ascribe this guilt to those who are visibly affected by this divine judgment.

Indeed, I feel as though we Protestant Christians were

now seeking to restore our spiritual equilibrium by thinking: "The question of guilt has been cleared up. Everything had to happen as it has happened. Now we, who know we are guiltless with regard to this disaster, can look forward to peace." This very collapse of our church, which may certainly be a great misfortune, offers us an opportunity, if we wish for one, to withdraw from the melee and save ourselves as innocent nonparticipants. The moment we think in this manner, however, we are on a false trail. The moment we make up our minds to accept the fact that God himself has here pronounced his judgment we have failed to recognize that it is God — the living God — who is filling the office of judge. We imagine that we are vindicated by the fact that God has punished the others. We look upon the whole affair as the judgment of a divine arbitrator who punishes the wicked and rewards the good. Jesus, however, has most emphatically forbidden us to think thus: "Nay; but except ye repent — except ye become converted — ye will all likewise perish." God is no arbitrator; he does not deal with us in such a way that we dare say, "The history of humanity is the judgment of humanity." If this were so we should be well off today; we in the church should suddenly find ourselves in the position of those "who had always said so" and were right in the end. But meanwhile we are forgetting that it is the living God who acts here, and that we ourselves are not safe from him for a moment. The fact that we were right does not help us today.

God has pronounced a judgment, but that fact alone does not settle the question of the judgment he will pronounce on us. That judgment does not depend on whether we have

acted better or more justly than the others; it depends — quite apart from all considerations of “better” or “worse” — simply on whether we are as God wants us to be. “More or less,” “better or worse,” are words which have no meaning in this case, for God’s judgment has not the slightest connection with any human summing-up or comparison.

Dear brethren, from time immemorial the favorite sin of us pious and respectable people has been to make ourselves judges and to declare ourselves innocent while condemning others or proving that others have been condemned by God.

Our old church has been found wanting in many respects — and God has sent a judgment upon it. Of that there is no doubt. And the new church which has destroyed the old one and taken its place has likewise been found wanting, and God’s judgment has fallen upon it with terrifying suddenness. Of that there is likewise no doubt. And what is the conclusion we draw? Are we, the Christian community, we who hear God’s word, now people who have been vindicated, people to whom God’s promise and Christ’s pledge rightly belong? “Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” It is God with whom we have to do. The lightning has struck our own house and we ourselves have been spared, and so we must surely read this one lesson from the divine judgment which is before our eyes: “Unless ye repent!” Therefore repent and be converted.

The word “repentance” has, I admit, depreciated greatly in value today; indeed it seems as though it has been outlawed and proscribed in our Protestant church. And the terrible thing about what has happened in the church at this time is that there has been no visible sign of what God’s word calls “repentance” and “conversion.” As a child



I learned that to repent meant to recognize one's sins, to confess, be sorry and cry for mercy. But we continue to act as though what had happened was merely a disaster to be accepted. We go on living as though things must come right again of themselves. We still take the attitude that as far as we personally are concerned we have nothing at all to do with this divine judgment.

And all this is happening in the church of Luther, where we are constantly hearing and pronouncing the name of the German Reformer, but where we anxiously conceal the fact that the first thesis with which the Reformation began runs as follows: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says, 'Repent!' he means the whole life of his followers to be repentance."

There is no faith without repentance, and there is no church without repentance. It is useless for us as a "Confessional Church" to condemn the doctrine of human pride and yet to remain proud ourselves. And there is no sense in our refusing to listen to Paul's doctrine of sin and inferiority if we are convinced, even without hearing it, that the word "sin" has no meaning for us. And as far as we are concerned, the great danger of this moment is that we should think that the call to repentance does not concern us, that this judgment of God is not meant for us, and that we may carry our heads high and talk righteously of the sins of others. We must not — we dare not — do so, or all will be lost.

We are dealing with the living God — no, the living God is dealing with us. And to know that means to know that the judgment of this living God can fall upon us, too, at any moment; to know that means to stand as penitents before

that God, to stand as men and women who have justly deserved God's judgment.

We still stand — and a Protestant church of Christ still stands — in the midst of our nation; there are still congregations on whom the Lord Jesus Christ works with his word. But behold the parable of the fig tree. The tree stands in the middle of the vineyard, broad and strong and healthy. It does not suspect that critical eyes have been watching it for years; it does not suspect that it owes its life to patience and to grace alone; it does not suspect that its doom has already been pronounced: "Cut it down! Why cumbereth it the ground?" It will still stand there tomorrow and the day after tomorrow — and yet it is condemned to death. The day will come when the patience and mercy which it thus takes for granted are at an end, and the man who tends it and digs about it and dungs it will take the ax and carry out the sentence.

The fact that we are still here, that there is still a Christian community — even today, after Pilate's cruelties have been repeated and the tower of Siloam has again killed eighteen and more, without harming us — is really no proof that we were better than the others. But it is a proof that God's patience and mercy toward us are not yet at an end, and that God is once more giving us an opportunity to thank him for his mercy and patience.

None of us knows how long this state of affairs will last. No one can say when the Lord Jesus Christ will lay aside the spade and take up the ax. We have no promise that the gospel will remain available for all time to us and to our nation. We have no pledge that Luther's work will endure.

One thing alone we know for certain: today we hear

again the message of God's mercy and patience, the message that is rightly called "good tidings" even though it begins with the call to repentance and leads us again and again to repentance. Our salvation does not lie in the fact that we are satisfied with ourselves and have given ourselves up to the alluring fancy that God, too, will surely be satisfied with us. But our salvation begins with our recognizing, from what the Lord Jesus Christ does to us, what God's judgment is with regard to us. It is an annihilating verdict: "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

When we hear that sentence we no longer know what to do, and we cannot continue to walk in the way of our desire. When we hear that sentence we must stand still and listen to discover whether God has not a word of mercy, of undeserved grace left for us. On that word our life and our church depend. And, behold, the call to repentance, "Repent ye!" becomes the word of grace in the mouth of him who pleads for us: "Come unto me! Lord, let it alone still a little while, that I may do my work on it."

Jesus Christ — thou alone art the light of our hope! AMEN.



# POWER

*(Fourth Sunday after Epiphany)*

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.



Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience's sake.

For, for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

— *Rom. 13:1-10*



When we look back at the thirtieth of January and remember what a vast amount of tenacious energy and passionate will power it has taken to set up the Third Reich and to carry it through these difficult years, the words of today's

scripture lesson may seem to us extremely cold and uninspiring. Perhaps we expect a text in which the gratitude and joy of a nation which has been given a new beginning are more clearly and radiantly reflected: "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

And in truth we have reason enough to spread abroad this acknowledgment of God's help, and openly to express our gratitude for God's guidance, for there is no doubt that, according to human calculation, things might have turned out quite differently if God had not watched protectingly over us. But for that we would many a time have been overwhelmed by destruction. But on the other hand, today, gathered together as a Christian congregation in the presence of God to hear God's word, we cannot possibly conceal from ourselves the disappointments and cares which weigh us down when we look at our church.

Many of our hopes have been shattered in these two years. We see more and more clearly how there is being propagated a new paganism which wishes to have nothing to do with the Saviour who was crucified for us, while the church which acknowledges that Saviour as its only Lord is reproached with being an enemy of the state and has difficulty in obtaining a hearing for its most earnest assurances to the contrary.

And it is hard, bitter hard, for us to bear this ignominy. Our good conscience rebels violently when in one breath people call us criminals and traitors to our nation. And we find it rather difficult to accept the fact that a Dr. Dinter and others should be allowed to harangue the people and to canvass for their anti-Christian views, while we are commanded to keep silent in public.

When we think of these things we are moved by a burning,

passionate desire to see the church of Christ find the justice to which we believe we have a claim in its name. And here again Paul's words, which we have just read, seem to us colorless and far too objective.

But just because things are thus, dear friends, just because there flares up within us this antagonism between our enthusiastic patriotism and our passionate desire for the church's welfare, just because we do not rightly know whether joy or sorrow has the greater right or whether we are nearer tears than laughter, it is good and indeed necessary for us to bow to the dispassionate objectivity of the word of God, in whose presence all human enthusiasm and all human passion must alike be silent. For in this word of God the question which confronts us today — the question of the relation of the church to the state, of the Christian community to the secular powers — is, so far as it affects our conduct, unequivocally and authoritatively answered. And the advantage of this answer is that it holds good independently of all our pros and cons, and without regard to enthusiasm or disappointment on our part, just because it is the incorruptible, self-assured and utterly objective word of God.

It is worth while for us to remember today that it is the government of the Emperor Nero which the apostle has before his eyes while he writes, "There is no power but of God." Manifestly the value of the government of any state is here made independent of human criticism as of human approval; nay, more, it is not even the moral worth or worthlessness of the rulers which is the decisive factor here.

To be sure, we discriminate. Here, too, we measure according to our standards and are inclined to ascribe a higher value to a power which is in harmony with our desires and



ideas than to a government hostile to them. That is only natural and cannot well be otherwise. But in reality our judgment here is false because all power receives its authority directly from God. We can therefore neither deduct anything from it by setting our disapproval against God's approval, nor can we add anything to it by strengthening God's approval with ours.

The authority peculiar to the state is as an ordinance of God subjected to no human conditions whatever and holds good independently of our approval or disapproval; it is so great that we can neither increase nor lessen it. The ruling power in the state is "God's minister" who is granted full authority and instructions by God and is responsible to him—to him, not to us.

That is an austere statement; there is nothing romantic about it. And even though we must admit that it would be quite impossible to speak of the authority of the state in higher terms or to depict it with greater majesty than Paul does here when he says that power is held "by the grace of God," we miss certain cordial strains; we miss the warm, personal, human relationship. For here, as you can see, the apostle speaks only of subordination or insubordination, of recompense or punishment. And is it not the height of austerity to say that the duty of the supreme power in the state is, by God's command, merely to protect the good and punish the evil?

It has been well said that we have got beyond that primitive conception according to which the state is based upon might and its duty is to enforce the law. We have grown familiar with the national state, which serves the nation, which looks after the nation's safety and cares for its welfare and culture.

The relation between us and the kind of state described by the words "authority" and "obedience" will not satisfy us in the long run. We should like a direct, personal relation of trust and love, a relation that means an enriching, a deepening and broadening of our life in the state, just as is true of the family, where to the divine commandment to "honor thy father and thy mother" love is added to parental authority and confidence to childish obedience. And then we see the truth of the old saying, "The good will of men and the favor of God — it is well if one has both together."

The only danger is that we may easily fall into thinking that the authority of the parents, like that of the ruling power, is based upon our human trust instead of on God's ordinance and commandment as it really is and inviolably remains. And then it is only one short step farther along the same road for us to ask that parents and the ruling power serve our will and desire and not God's commandment; and another small step for us to claim the right to oppose their authority and to resist it when our expectations are disappointed.

That is why God's word declares so clearly that the authority of the ruling power is based upon God's ordinance and that its real and permanent duty consists in God's mandate to administer the law in his name and to protect the work of the good man and resist the actions of the evildoer. As the "minister of God" it must answer to its Lord how far and how justly it is fulfilling this commission.

For us as Christians and as a church of the gospel only one attitude is possible here: to accept God's will without argument and honor his ordinance, not from motives of calculating shrewdness but, as Paul says, "for conscience's

sake," just because it is God's ordinance, because it is his good and gracious will that the powers that be rule in his name and under his commission and that we bow to their authority and conscientiously yield to them our willing obedience.

But, however simple that interpretation may sound, one difficulty seems to be completely overlooked here. Is it really the case that rulers are "not a terror to good works, but to the evil"? Has Paul, has the Christian community in Rome, not had an entirely different experience under Nero? And does not the care which weighs us down originate in the very fact that we are convinced that we are right and yet see ourselves unjustly numbered with the transgressors?

But that consideration does not cause God's ordinance to be repealed, and so we remain conscientiously bound to give it what is its due: tribute and obedience and respect — and, if need be, body and soul.

As long as we call Jesus Christ our Lord, as long as we acknowledge God's will to be wholly inviolable, we have no right to be disobedient because of the injustice done us. Against such injustice there is only one weapon. "Do that which is good, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you!"

Of course, we may perhaps also have a right to disobedience; but this right may be exercised only when we are asked to do wrong, and then it is a duty, for "one must obey God rather than men." But even this duty does not release us from that other duty "to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's."

Thus Christian faith and loyalty to the state have belonged



together from the time of pagan Rome till the present day; for where the gospel is held in esteem there God's ordinance is also honored. That is why a Protestant Christian who is an enemy to the state, or a Protestant church which is an enemy to the state, is a contradiction; for even if all enthusiasm and all natural love for the state were extinguished God's word and command would continue in force: "Owe no man anything."

In any case, we also know the limitations of all state power; we know that all earthly kingdoms and rulers are formed according to the image of this world which passes away, that the kingdom of God to which we are called is not a kingdom of this world, and that no kingdom of this world can be made into the kingdom of God. Therefore we have no enthusiasm for any earthly state and therefore we do not dream of the return of a golden age.

But we are grateful to God that he has not left his fallen creation without his ordinance, that with the sword his grace has given to the powers that be he fights against human sin, so that the message of his kingdom — Christ's message — may continue to be spread abroad and the fellowship of the faithful may meet together as an assembly in which love and not only law holds sway; in which God's will is confirmed in freedom and which will thus point the way to the present and eternal kingdom of God.

And while we thank God today for having given our nation a government, and for having through it preserved order and peace for us, at the same time we ask him to guide and rule our Führer and his counselors, our nation and our church, in such a way that his kingdom may come and be a reality among us.

AMEN.

## FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

*(Fifth Sunday after Epiphany)*

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.



I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,  
Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,  
For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;  
Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in  
you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my  
heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the  
gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of  
Jesus Christ.

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge  
and in all judgment:

That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and  
without offense till the day of Christ;

Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto  
the glory and praise of God.

— *Phil. 1:3-11*



We and our Protestant church are in a rather peculiar position at the present time. We seem to be waiting for a decision which will put an end to long uncertainty; we feel that it cannot be long now before it becomes clear whether the future of our church is to be life or death, freedom or more bitter slavery, peace or renewed struggle.

Many a time already we have thought that the clouds were about to clear away and let the sun break through; but then of a sudden everything became impenetrably dark again.

And today no man can say whether the decision will be made at all, when it will be given or what form it will take.

However that may be and whatever may be the outcome, dear friends, the present situation is fraught with temptation for us and for the whole Protestant church in our nation. And the temptation to which we are in danger of succumbing is this: that we may stare as though hypnotized and crippled at the decision with the making of which we have nothing at all to do; that we may regard this decision concerning the life or death, the freedom or slavery, the peace or strife of our church as that on which everything ultimately depends. Such a situation might very well end by making us tired and dispirited under the strain of anxious suspense.

When the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the congregation at Philippi he saw himself and his mission faced with the same temptation. Neither he nor any of his followers knew what the next day would bring forth. The hands of the apostle himself were tied, for he was a prisoner. The decision about life and death lay in the hands of the Roman emperor. Notwithstanding, in this period of utter uncertainty and supreme perplexity and weakness, Paul wrote a letter which not only breathes strength and confidence and joy in every line but even rises to exultation: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice!"

And yet the cause which gave rise to this letter was slight and insignificant enough: the Christian church at Philippi had — as on a former occasion — sent their teacher a gift of money to help support him. But Paul sees in their action a proof not only of love and friendship but of good work begun in his congregation which bears within it the promise of growth and perfection. The trivial act becomes great and



the insignificant deed important. For this beginning points to an end. And Paul has no anxiety with regard to this end; on the contrary, he speaks of himself as "being confident of this very thing"!

It will be well, dear friends, if we, too, consciously and resolutely take no notice of the coming decisions, however seriously they may affect us. In Paul's day everything was at stake and it was truly a matter of life and death. It will be well for us, too, to turn our eyes to the work which has begun among us and which is filling us with gratitude and joy.

And the work is indeed no small thing. In any case it is much more than we had dared to hope. The fact that not one of the many hundreds of our brethren who have been driven from office has had to suffer want with his family, the fact that helping hands have been stretched out from all sides — and that not only once, but again and again during many months — is surely reason for joy and gratitude. For who would have thought that there was still so much sympathy and unity of spirit in our poor church, which has been so split up and has grown so lukewarm?

We must not, however, be content to stop at thanking one another, and rejoicing together because of this sympathy and cooperative spirit! There is something — or at least the beginnings of something — greater and more important behind this spirit, something that unlocks our hearts to others and opens our hands to give; and that something is what Paul calls "fellowship in the gospel."

We are learning once more what that fellowship is and what it means. It is again being borne in upon us that the congregation of the gospel, the church of Jesus Christ, is a

reality in our midst which includes and sustains each one of us personally.

If the gifts for the alleviation of the distress in our congregations are flowing in freely, if in many places the church accommodation has become too small for the men and women who wish to hear God's word, if — even in "dead" areas — there are again assembling at the table of the Lord whole congregations desirous of having their hunger satisfied and their thirst quenched, if here and there the Scriptures are once more being honored and read in the homes of the people — these things are but the beginnings of a new church fellowship which is being called forth by the glad tidings.

And we rejoice because of this new spirit of union. Our hymns sound fuller and more joyously, our united prayer rises with greater strength and more conviction from our hearts, and we are at home in a way quite different from that of the past in the "fellowship of the gospel."

All this, however, is not happening by chance, and it cannot be separated from the peculiar distress into which God has led us. He is using this time of trouble to teach us once more that we must not only listen to his word now and again, but that we must live for it if it is to bestow its living strength on us.

For the Philippians, Paul's imprisonment made their fellowship in the gospel become a reality; for us, the oppression which in many places weighs upon the Protestant congregations wakens us to our common responsibility and forces us to open our ears to the message which God is sending us today. Under such circumstances what, humanly speaking, is distress and terror and sorrow and tribulation for the

church takes on an entirely different aspect. Here God is beginning a good work in us; and under his hand terror turns to joy and lamentation to gratitude.

It is as true of God's people today as it was of the children of Israel that "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." And so we learn a new way of thinking which turns to God. "I thank thee that thou dost humble me and help me. For when thou dost humble me thou makest me great."

And so we will let our eyes be opened to see God's marvelous work, which leads us into the depths in order that we may be glad of his help, which sets us in the midst of sorrow in order that we may learn to thank him for the fellowship in the gospel. The beginning of that work is already here. Will it go farther? Will it be crowned by fulfillment? We do not know; but we must admit that there is room for doubt.

Could this new birth in Christ possibly be brought about in our church and in our congregations if it should please God suddenly to remove the oppression which is weighing upon us? I know that this question weighs heavily on many a man who joyfully and gratefully consents to travel the road along which we are now being led. If the oppression were removed, would not the congregations which have assembled and joined together as the "Confessional Church" be again scattered to the four winds, would not the old misery of loneliness and indifference begin anew?

Or, on the other hand, what will happen if the oppression becomes stronger, if we are asked to suffer and endure in earnest, as has already come to pass here and there? Will our strength be great enough to enable us to remain loyal?



Assuredly, dear friends, it will then be made manifest what were only our own desires and actions and what is God's work. For our desires and actions will sooner or later reach their limits and collapse; but God's work will go on.

God does not stop at half measures and his loyalty does not let us fall before we have reached the goal. We must, like Paul, be confident that he will complete his work, provided his work has begun in us. If only the beginning is right, if only we base our adherence to him not on our own good will but on his loyalty, if only we do not trust to our own strength but let ourselves be stayed and upheld by his grace!

Paul bases his confidence in the congregation at Philippi on the fact that they are all partakers of grace with him. That means, however, that their fellowship in the gospel really comes from the gospel, and that their brotherly love springs from grace, from the forgiving love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not from other motives or thoughts.

It is certainly natural and explicable that in the reality of our Christian life both as individuals and as a congregation there should still be many foreign undercurrents; that subsidiary motives and side issues should creep in; that questions of human relationships and friendships, of the recognition and recompense of our services, should take up our attention, perhaps without our being conscious of them, perhaps without our suspecting their existence. But these influences suddenly come to light if we feel that we are not adequately esteemed, not fully recognized. God's grace does not suddenly create perfectly selfless men and women, it does not take away secret selfishness all at once. But it does possess and it does impart to us the power to keep from faltering in our fight against hidden self-love, and in the struggle

this power makes true love grow strong to recognize more and more clearly where its path and its duty lie. It makes us draw more deeply and abundantly upon the forgiving and sustaining love of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may live by that love and in that love.

It is really not enough for us to accept the gospel message of grace *once*. The message is given us so that our love may be enriched by it in knowledge and experience, and so that it may bear the fruit which the Lord Jesus Christ creates in us, that we may honor our God.

Thus to the great gratitude for what we have already been given in the fellowship of the gospel is added the confident request for what we still lack, that we may continue to grow and abide in this fellowship until the Lord Jesus Christ himself comes and puts an end to the struggle.

Then the seemingly great decisions for which we are now so anxiously waiting will shrink to their true proportions, though they may have been called decisions of life or death, freedom or slavery, peace or strife; and the seemingly small decisions amid which we find ourselves today and every day will, though at the moment they mean only obedience or self-will, growth or stagnation, be seen as the truly great and truly decisive things they are; for here it is the most important matter of all that is at stake — the question of heaven or hell.

And so, even in these days of uncertainty and care and anxiety, and particularly while we are bowed down by the burden of these times, we shall keep our eyes open to the one and only thing that is needful — and that is that God's work may continue in us and that we may abide and grow in the fellowship of the gospel.

AMEN.

# MARTHA AND MARY

(*Septuagesima*)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.



Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.

And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:

But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

— *Luke 10:38-42*



It is quite possible, dear brethren, that the two sisters with whom this gospel lesson deals were of entirely different natures. For generations we have been accustomed to represent Martha as the typical shrewish, duty-ridden woman, and Mary, on the other hand, as tender-hearted and meditative; and art has contributed its share toward impressing this picture indelibly on our minds. We speak carelessly of a "Martha nature" and a "Mary nature" as of established and immutable dispositions.

Granted that it is natural to put such a construction on this little story, granted that in this way the different conduct of the two women is easily explained, this is nevertheless an in-



terpretation which prevents us from reaching a proper and clearly defined attitude with regard to the real question which comes up here. Is Jesus here commending Mary's way of acting as opposed to Martha's; is Mary's type of piety, which takes and welcomes what it receives, of more value in his sight than that of Martha, which gives and acts; is the one essentially nearer and dearer to him than the other? But in any case we must not be sorry for ourselves, for instance, because our disposition happens to make us active, busy and efficient like Martha, and in the same way we must not consider ourselves fortunate if we are receptive and meditative like Mary. For each temperament has its blessings and each its dangers.

Not only did Jesus caution Martha with regard to her preoccupation with her duties; he pointed with equal earnestness to the results of shirking one's duties: "Everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand." And Jesus not only praised Mary for listening quietly to his words; he as emphatically lauded active obedience: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

We are thus forbidden to make this story a reason for setting the "Mary nature" above the "Martha nature," for setting contemplative Christianity above active Christianity, as though Jesus had here expressed himself in favor of the one and against the other. There is no hint of that at all; and this solution will not fit. Rather do we read in the Gospel of St. John — and also in the Gospel of St. Luke — that "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

The difference in his attitude toward the two sisters is not

one of degree of sympathy, just as the difference in their attitude toward him is not one of more and less affection and love for him. For this reason probably it is also emphasized — in order to avoid possible misunderstanding — that it was Martha who received him into her house, and that she then set to work as a housewife, certainly not churlishly and ill-temperedly, but with the happy zeal of love, to serve the dear guest, while her sister Mary, certainly not because of laziness and indolence but because of an inner urge, listened to the teaching of the Master — which does not mean, by the bye, that Mary was the only listener and that Jesus was here holding a special, personal, heart-searching conversation with her. Had that been the case Martha would scarcely have dared to interfere.

We must rather think of the situation as something like this: The poor overworked housewife cannot alone do the work for Jesus and his companions, and the only helper she has, her sister, leaves her in the lurch to listen to what Jesus is saying. We can understand the ill humor in Martha's words, and the moral right is undoubtedly on her side.

Now if Jesus' answer meant that Martha must not let her harassing household duties crowd out the quiet hours of meditation and reflection, well and good. But surely if he meant that, he recognized her claim to Mary's help. The quickest way to restore the disturbed equilibrium between labor and rest, between giving and receiving, would have been for both sisters to observe the sensible rule, "There is a time for all things." Then they would have shared the serving and the listening and both would have had justice.

But Jesus is obviously not concerned with such justice

either. It really does not matter to him, and his words about "the one thing that is needful" remain an unsolved riddle to us as long as we seek to understand them from the point of view of our own judgments and wishes and demands.

When Jesus speaks of this one thing he does not mean anything which lies in our nature, in our mind or in our conduct; he does not mean anything which we could of ourselves strive after and seek and find if only we were given a hint as to how to proceed. This one thing is to be found only in him. Nay, more; we can say that he himself is this one thing, because he is the one person who is needful to us.

The fact that it is Jesus and not any other pious and wise man who goes into the house of Martha and Mary, the fact that he speaks and teaches in their home and that the two women have to deal with him — the one by looking after his comfort and the other by listening to his words — unlocks the door to the proper understanding of the story and makes it impossible for us to deduce any general rules of life or conduct from it. Here stands the one person in whom is to be found the one thing needful, the one person in whom, without our agency, are effectively revealed those things of which it is written: "What eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Because it is God who is here acting in the one person our work must cease in his presence; because it is God who here speaks to us in the one person our voices must here be silent. For what God says and does to us in this Jesus can, if it pass us by, be replaced by nothing that we think or do, by no pious zeal and by no pious service. It is the "one thing which is needful"; and where we are permitted to come into contact



with that one person we must obey the command: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." — And so Martha is warned: "Thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful." What may in other circumstances be quite justified here becomes a hindrance and a danger; for he who speaks thus is "come not to be served, but to serve." And because Mary accepted this service she received the testimony, "She hath chosen that good part," and the promise, "It will not be taken away from her."

Thus this incident becomes an allegory, one not meant to present Mary's quiet listening as being better than Martha's restless activity, but to make plain to all who hear it — not only to Martha but also to Mary, who in all likelihood was amazed at Jesus' words — that in this Jesus there is something which most assuredly decides our fate. In him is to be found the one thing needful in our relation to God, and in his presence we cannot and must not do anything different from what Mary did, perhaps unconsciously. We must listen and pay heed without argument.

For what is to be found in Christ is grace — that is, a work of God to which we can add nothing — and as Christ's message this work of God creates faith and brings the sinner to peace with the gracious God. Thus Paul writes to the Romans, "Faith cometh by hearing" — or, as Luther translates, "by preaching."

And so the story of Martha and Mary leads us to the fundamental belief of the Reformation, and we can express Jesus' words, "one thing is needful," in Luther's interpretation: "No man becomes a Christian through the doing of works, but through listening to the word of God." To hold fast to

that perception and to pay heed to it means choosing the good part which "will not be taken away."

And now, dear brethren, we may also ask what special message this story can and must have for us today.

We are not saying too much, I am convinced, when we claim that the Lord Jesus Christ has again returned to our midst. He is somehow nearer to our nation than he has been for some years, and people are speaking of him and fighting for him with a passion which we had scarcely thought possible. A sure sign that he is here.

And now come the "cares of Martha." We should like him really to come into his own. We wish all who love him to help in preparing a friendly and worthy reception for him. The work is increasing, it is becoming too heavy for us in face of the difficulties which arise. "Cares of Martha" about school and church, "cares of Martha" about child education and the guidance of youth, "cares of Martha" about the educated classes and about the "masses." What shall we in the Confessional Church do that our nation may be saved for the Lord Jesus Christ and led back to the Christian faith? Can this result be achieved by a united church, by bishops and synods, or by discussions with the German Christians, with Dinter and Rosenberg? Who would wish, who would dare to blame us for being "careful and troubled about many things"!

But "one thing is needful." And without this one thing we are pouring water into a bottomless cask; without this one thing we are building a tower without a foundation. We are a confessional church only if we listen and pay heed to the fact that the eternal God has made himself known to us in the one person, Jesus Christ; that this one thing

obliges us again and again to let ourselves be gripped and upheld by this message; and that all that we are ready to do in his service can be carried out only through this one message. "It is better to neglect anything rather than the Word, and nothing is more worth cultivating than the Word." This one thing is needful!

AMEN.



# JUDGE ME, O GOD!

(*Judica: Passion Sunday*)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.



Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: Oh deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.

For thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

Oh send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God, my God.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

— *Ps. 43*



From time immemorial, dear brethren, this psalm has been associated with this second Sunday before the Passion, which bears its name: “*Judica* — judge me, O God, and plead my cause!” It is a prayer for justice addressed to him who is the judge of all justice and injustice, a prayer by one whose rights have been withheld and to whom wrong has been done.

And it must be confessed that it is easy to connect this wailing cry of one forlorn with the suffering of the Lord, who in his suffering and death endured every injustice, and who in his last abandonment cried aloud, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

It is an affliction, a deep and unconquerable affliction, when justice is destroyed, when injustice gains the victory and God

is silent. And when we have the same experience as the psalmist, the plaintive "Why? Why dost thou cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" — imperceptibly becomes an accusation, and then this *why?* begins to weigh so heavily upon us that our faith, our trust in God, threatens to give way under it — and quite often does give way under it. For how are we to believe in God, how can we fear, love and trust God above all things, if in the world iniquity triumphs and the will of God's enemies proves itself the stronger?

Dear friends, this affliction was also part of Christ's sufferings, and now it is part of the sufferings of those who follow in his steps.

Today all the bells of the German Protestant churches are silent, and in every divine service a prayer of intercession is being said for the five Protestant pastors from Hesse and Saxony who have been taken away from their congregations and put into the concentration camp in spite of the remonstrances made by the interim church management to the authorities. And so the only course left open to us is to act according to the words, "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it," and we turn, seeking justice and help, to the supreme and highest court. "Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an unholy nation."

But alas! that appeal does not remove the affliction. The question *why* continues to torment and oppress us and undermine our faith.

I am thinking of a dear young colleague in the neighborhood of Frankfurt who was arrested almost three weeks ago. His mother is lying in the hospital fighting for life after a dangerous operation for cancer; his old father had a severe

paralytic stroke when he heard the news. And what is the cause for the arrest? The mere fact that the pastor, in opposition to the order of the unlawful bishop, an order contrary to the creed of the church, refused to leave his congregation and his congregation refused to leave him.

Injustice carries the day and is victorious. Why? Where is the justice of God? Where is the faith, in those whom this injustice affects, in us who look on, the faith which fears and loves and trusts God above all things?

Once you might have dismissed the young pastor's arrest by calling it an isolated incident. In similar fashion you might have dismissed other examples of injustice which suddenly enter the field of vision of the whole congregation. But today *why* is among us all. And whether voiced or unuttered, we all know it and all feel the distress which gave it birth. We read one passage in Isaiah: "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart." And the singer Asaph declares in the seventy-third Psalm: "I was envious when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

Dear brethren, it is so very easy to grow bitter when our *why* remains unanswered by God and to seek solace elsewhere. Yes, there is among us much bitterness and self-defense which grasps at the sole human expedient left when our endurance is exhausted: cold and indifferent contempt.

It is bad when things come to that pass, for that is death. It is doubly bad when the freezing hand of this death is laid on the place from which living streams of faith and love should flow, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the real, the great temptation of this moment, when violence and injustice — falsely practiced in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ — have destroyed the outer structure of the



Protestant church, is that the congregation, powerless as it is to resist, may fall into bitterness and silent hatred, and thus let in death.

A warning signpost must be set up here: we dare not follow this road; we dare not persist in asking "Why?" and keep on obstinately demanding the rights which have been taken from us. If we do so, we shall suddenly find that we are measuring God's thoughts by our thoughts and making our faith depend upon God's doing what we wish. When that happens it is all over with our faith, for faith exists only where we leave the guidance to God and put ourselves in his hands so that we may do what he wishes.

That is why the psalmist tears himself free from the doubting, tempting question; that is why his prayer for justice changes to a petition for guidance for his faith: "Send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me!" For our salvation does not depend upon whether we have been given our rights nor upon the doing of our will; but it is lost and forfeit if the injustice which weighs upon us gains the upper hand and determines our thoughts and actions.

God's guidance! That is what we need if the tribulation through which we must pass is to become not the temptation which will work our ruin, but the trial which will prove that we are right. And if we therefore make this prayer our own, "Oh send forth thy light and thy truth; let them lead me" — then, in addition to the unknown supplicator of the Old Testament, there intercedes for us that familiar figure from the garden of Gethsemane, who prayed until he could put aside the thought of injustice and accept the will of his Father: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." There is the guid-

ance which we need; there the question *why?* has been overcome; there we find no bitterness toward and no contempt of the ungodly nation, the "deceitful and unjust men" who cause the injustice. In Christ's case injustice rises to its supreme satanic proportions; but its power is broken, it is set aside, for, in the words of the apostle Peter, "he committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously."

And even the evildoers are encompassed by a forgiving love which beareth all things and endureth all things and which therefore hopeth all things and attaineth all things. "Father, forgive them!"

To be sure, we may say and possibly we are forced to say that the road which is here shown us is too steep for us to follow, and that this light is too bright and this truth too great for us to be able to grasp. We cannot possibly cope with the injustice which is being done us in such a way that no bitterness remains; we are simply not capable of being so forgiving that we can return genuine love for enmity. No effort, however strenuous, and no practice, however constant, can really make us do so or teach us to do so.

But the other thing is possible for us, and that is that we trust ourselves to the leadership of him who is the light of the world and the truth of God. We can let him set us before the holy God in such a way that in his presence our iniquity is revealed and our accusing *why?* is silenced; in such a way that we recognize we have no right to ask for anything, but that we are ourselves dependent upon grace and forgiveness. Then the roots of the bitterness which seeks to poison us are cut off so that it must wither and die; then there is room for the glad tidings of the forgiving love of the Lord Jesus Christ which seeks me and is meant for me and

bestows upon me the courage of faith, so that I dare hold fast to God, so that I may go “to the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.”

Where faith wakens and comes to life the injustice which is done us loses its power to tempt us and cannot have dominion over us. *Nubiculum est, transibit*; it is but a little cloud and will soon pass. But the sun remains. The light and the truth of God, which are present in Jesus Christ, have a compelling force. We trust in them and, as a church of the gospel, we will testify to them in spite of distress and persecution, aye, in the midst of distress and persecution.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul?  
and why art thou disquieted within me?  
Hope in God;  
for I shall yet praise him,  
who is the health of my countenance,  
and my God.

AMEN.



# THE BURIAL

*(Good Friday Evening)*

Grace be with you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,  
who gave himself for our sins! Amen.



And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him:

Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Josès, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple:

He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.

And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed.

And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulcher.

Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.

Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.

So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

— *Matt. 27:55-66*



“Sealing the stone.” . . . Crucified, dead and buried! The destiny of Jesus of Nazareth has been fulfilled, and everything has happened as it had to happen. For no nation will allow its religion, its own peculiar piety, its chosen faith to be destroyed. And the threat of destruction to all

these things was, of course, the trouble on that Good Friday — if we look at the human motives. Here we see a people proud of its history and of its blood — “We have Abraham to our father!” — a nation proud of its piety and of its temple — “What buildings are here!” This people has carried out reprisals and vengeance on the man who set his face against its pride, proclaiming the approaching sovereignty of God which orders all human arrogance to repent but does not offer any real or tangible substitute. “Believe in the gospel!”

What does the gospel or “good news” really mean on the lips of him who takes away from us all wherein we find pleasure and destroys all whereon we pride ourselves? Abraham’s children? — “I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” An everlasting Jerusalem? — “There shall not be left here one stone upon another.”

And so everything really had to happen as it happened: Christ was crucified, died and was buried — and they sealed the stone!

On the evening of Good Friday the high priests and the Pharisees heave a sigh of relief. Public peace and safety have been restored; the unity of the church and of the religion of the Jewish nation has been preserved; the national faith has gained a complete victory. The old hope may now awake to new life; the nation may again proclaim and believe: “We are Abraham’s seed; we are the heirs according to the promise; ours is the everlasting kingdom.”

The people has spoken, and its words have condemned the teacher of Nazareth to eternal silence. Is not the voice of the people the voice of God?

But how comes it that this Jesus does not remain silent? How comes it that he — who has just been laid in the tomb — again begins to speak? “After three days I will rise again!” Whence comes the terror which drives the victors back to Pilate, when they have scarcely won the victory, to beg him for protection against the dead man?

Dear friends, it is a futile undertaking for a man, indeed for a whole nation, to try to get rid of the living God. It is of no use whatever to brand the Lord Jesus Christ as an enemy of the people and put him to death and lay him in the tomb among the dead. Anyone who has once met him, anyone who has listened to his word and seen his work, anyone who has felt his omnipotence, has heard God pass sentence upon himself, and that sentence remains in force.

It was a delusion on the part of Jesus’ enemies to think that they could escape the sentence which he had passed upon them by the sentence which they passed on him. On the contrary, God’s judgment begins in the terror with which the dead Christ inspires his enemies; that is the judgment of the living God on all efforts made by man to regain his peace of mind.

In ordinary circumstances people are not afraid of a dead man. People do not as a rule seek police protection against someone who has been buried. Here it is otherwise. This Jesus of Nazareth is given up to universal contempt. He is condemned and executed, he is buried — and yet we are not done with him.

Conscience knows well that he has spoken the truth. And more than that, conscience knows that it was God who spoke to him. And whether we bow to his judgment now and believe in him, or whether we resist his judgment and



refuse to accept him, our self-assurance is at an end; the Jesus who has been put to death proves to be just as dangerous as was the living Jesus. But that is an uncanny situation; and that is why the attempt to get rid of him, to silence him by every method within human power, continues to meet with no success. He has been put to death, yet the terror remains; his followers have been persecuted up till the present day, but the unrest has not abated.

The fact is that it is useless for us to fight against God. Our resistance serves only to show forth his might and his truth.

How does it happen that today on Good Friday the churches seem too small to accommodate those who are flocking into them? This coming together is certainly not only the survival of old custom—that has long ago fallen into decay; it is not only human sympathy with a tragic destiny—there are plenty of other opportunities to exercise such sympathy; it is not only Christian faith wishing to draw new energy from the message of the cross—else the churches would not be empty again at Easter.

No, the reason is that the crucified, dead and buried Christ gives us no peace, that the execution of Jesus was a vain effort on the part of men, and that we ourselves must either fight against the dead Christ or bow down to him, because humanity has achieved only one result with Golgotha: its resistance has brought it up against God himself and it is now forced to see that its work was altogether in vain.

And even if men have refused to see and still call him a deceiver in spite of the voice of their conscience, even if they succeed in again getting the state to intervene—we see in their attitude the unwilling confession of the van-

quished victors: "We are at the end of our resources and can do no more; thou hast conquered, O Galilean!"

We men tried to sit in judgment upon God, and now we discover that he has sat in judgment upon us, and all that is left for us to decide is whether we will bow to God's judgment or resist it, whether we will acknowledge God's authority or persist in our iniquity.

The death of Jesus on the cross brings us yet another message. It not only tells that all human pride, all human assurance, all human power here collapse under God's judgment and are reduced to nought; it also speaks of how God gives grace to the humble, how he comforts the despondent heart and strengthens those who are weak and helpless.

To be sure, the cross is the work of human hands, and as such it is an attempted rebellion against God which was bound to fail in the past and which is bound to fail on any future occasion. But this same cross is also the free act of obedience of him who prayed in Gethsemane, "Not my will, but thine, be done!" It is the free act of love of him who says to us, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

And if we hear this message of the cross, if we look upon the death of Jesus as the act of obedience and love, we will no longer say, "It all happened as it had to happen." Then the words "crucified, dead and buried" will hold a miracle which will not let us go, yea, the miracle of all miracles, of which the poet sings: "Oh miracle without measure! Behold, the master has let himself be slain for his servant!"

There are a few to whom a premonition of this miracle comes while they stand at the foot of Jesus' cross. I do not mean Christ's arrogant enemies, who are making a final

attempt to maintain their authority. Nor do I mean the eleven disciples who had meant to be so valiant in their allegiance. I refer to a man "who was also a disciple of Jesus" but only "secretly," as John reports, "for fear of the Jews." He is gripped by this miracle of obedience and love; he dares to risk his life in order to procure an honorable burial for the crucified Christ. And, according to the Gospel of St. John, there is with him another man who had until then been likewise a secret disciple of Jesus — Nicodemus, who had once come to Jesus by night — "for fear of the Jews"; and a few women are also present, among them Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.

Merely a few frightened and despondent souls in whom the divine power of this death is making itself felt, a few souls who, vanquished by the love that had made Christ give up his life for man, of their own free will profess their faith in him as he hangs dying upon the cross and so become heralds of his resurrection after the crucifixion is over.

But what meaning has this story for us on Good Friday, 1935? We will let Luther speak to us: "Such an incident stands out as an example to us all, so that we may imitate this Joseph and Nicodemus, and when Christ hangs upon the cross, that is, when the gospel is being persecuted and the poor Christians martyred for its sake, we may step forth and, regardless of the wrath of the tyrants, praise the Son of God and his word, and honor it by publicly professing our faith in it; until in his glorious resurrection the dead Christ shall appear, and then the fainthearted, timid, frightened Christians will also be comforted and will again be ready to profess their faith in him!"

AMEN.



## BUT GOD!

### *(Second day of Easter)*

Grace be unto you and peace from Him who is and was and is to be,  
the living God! Amen.



But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,  
Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by  
grace ye are saved);

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places  
in Christ Jesus. — *Eph. 2:4-6*



What do we mean by Easter?

It can scarcely be put into words, dear friends; for when we try to describe it we succeed only in giving a faltering account of an inexpressible, soul-shattering abundance. For who will say what life is? Our heart has some slight idea of its meaning, and out-of-doors we catch a glimpse of it in nature. But it is like the sea, without beginning or end. We look over it, but we cannot see the other side; we cannot grasp it, but it takes hold of us and carries us along with it, we know not how. It is made up of the rhythm of pleasure and pain, of love and sorrow, of doubt and hope. A song rings out and when it dies away a new one has already begun; a wave rises, and when it falls back the next is already rolling in.

No, it is hopeless to try to express this immeasurable and confusing abundance, this beneficent and yet oppressive force in whose power we are, in thoughts and words, as though we could encompass it.

Life is greater than we are; and Easter brings us news of this ungovernable life which laughs at death and which can be checked by no grave. Easter brings us news of life eternal, and in our poor little human hearts the echo of yearning awakes. "Spring plays upon the earth; let it be spring-time in our hearts; let light eternal reign!"

Is that our Easter? Then let us be careful lest these poor little human hearts learn something that will change all their bright hopes of spring, all their tender longings for life, into utter darkness and terror.

The fact that all our way lies over graves is an old story to us; we have long accepted and grown accustomed to the idea that things are so and not otherwise. We plant flowers on every grave and in so doing think our own thoughts on how life must spring again even from death. And though we may feel a stab of pain at this or that grave and wonder: "Why so soon? Why so suddenly? Why so cruelly?" — we get over that, if only we take a tight hold on our heart and forbid it to keep on asking that obstinate "Why?" In the end we even become reconciled to the thought that in our own short life the spring dies away, summer, autumn and winter come and go, and in the end only a grave remains.

If only this one short life granted to us is worth while, if only it achieves and creates something that will remain and live on, then the flowers will bloom on our grave too; then the sun of life will continue to shine over our death. Man must die, his individual life is of no great importance. But Life remains and its transfiguring light streams out even beyond our grave and announces its victory over death.

The light is dimmed; the yearning has died away; the joy

has ceased. Yet why grow bitter? As though every harvest did not turn to seed again, as though fulfillment had not its rights as well as yearning. Why not let our heart say with the poet, when the road is nearing its end, "Come what may, ye happy eyes, all ye have seen was so fair!"

Yes, how comes it that the Easter message of the omnipotence of life in the end leaves us utterly empty so that we rebel against it in our innermost hearts? Is it only because it does not satisfy our claims that we want more than a universal message of life, that we long for personal survival beyond death and the grave, for a new life free from the shackles of human and earthly imperfections? As the poet makes Zarathustra say with striking truth: "Pain says: pass away! — but pleasure always wants to last forever, wants to last forever and ever!"

What prevents us, then, from turning to this hope? What prevents us from believing in a personal eternal life, an immortality of the soul? For the longing for immortality is an instinct that runs through all nations and all times like a last faint hope. And now to crown all comes Easter, the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb; and we hear that henceforth he will not die and that death can nevermore wield power over him.

Even though that inmost core of our being — that secret corner where in our forefathers dwelt the instinct of immortality — has been covered up, surely it must now reveal itself again. For shall we not now joyfully proclaim, "We bid you hope"?

Death is not the last word even with regard to the individual human life. There is a personal, eternal life of perfection, free from all earthly toil and travail, a life of which the Bible tells us: "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow,



nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things have passed away."

I am sure we have often heard these tidings in this or in similar form, and when all is said and done this is probably the truly happy message for which our heart is silently yearning and waiting: "The power of death is destroyed and we are restored to life."

Which of us, dear friends, would not have liked to give this belief a trial — and which of us would not have come to grief with it, too, when things became serious and went hard with us! For there is a "but" — a great "but" — connected with it; and at the decisive moment this "but" comes between us and our hope: *But — God!*

If God is the supreme and decisive reality behind all life and death, what then? Then, to be sure, it suddenly becomes extremely unimportant whether we sing hymns to the miracle of life, or deck our graves with flowers, or believe in immortality for the human soul. Such things are all very well; *but what of God?* If he exists what is our position? Seriously, dear friends, we speak of God as though we knew him; we sing and pray as though we were on the best of terms with him; we worry about life and death as though we took it for granted that God agrees with our ideas.

And in so doing we forget that when we are dealing with God all our talking, singing, thinking and doing become of questionable value, because it is God who passes judgment on them and not we, and because all depends on what he decrees with regard to our life and death.

God! That means our life rests on a new foundation and our arrogance is at an end. Man wills, believes and thinks — *but God!* Everywhere and always this last "but" — *but God!*

And we run against it and of necessity resist it; for we cannot bear that another should be lord over us. "You will be as God!" — that remains our goal even though we may not admit it; therein do we seek the fulfillment of our life. There is no getting away from the fact that we should like God — however Godlike we may conceive him to be — to do what we want. And that desire is what the Scriptures call "sin"; and because of this sin, because we refuse to recognize his authority, God places us under the dominion and under the law of death.

Now we yearn for life. Now we dream of life. Now we may even hope for immortality. Yet death stands in our way and sin hangs between us and this immortality: *but — God!*

How much of Easter have we left, if it is true that "the wages of sin is death," if we must see ourselves as those who are "dead in their sins"? This one thing remains — no, this one thing is gained: now we know at last that what troubles us is not a flaw in the beauty of life, but a deep and yawning chasm that runs through the whole of life.

Our desire is not for a life which endures longer than death; we yearn for the life which vanquishes death, which knows not sin, behind which there can be seen no menacing "but — God."

Dear brethren, it is the old question which crops up again and again, although it is said on every hand to be obsolete: "How can we find a gracious God; how can we make our peace with God; where shall we find forgiveness of sin?" For where there is forgiveness of sin there life and happiness are also to be found, and there alone the agonizing "*but — God*" is at last silenced.

Thus over all our Easter joy lies the shadow of Good Friday. For there, in the crucifixion of Jesus, sin is revealed as a conscious and intentional rebellion against God. And so Jesus has to die because the sovereignty of God is revealed in him; so Jesus has to die because we do not want the sovereignty of God. And then we can go no further; we do not want God and yet we cannot live without him!

What else does the cross mean but that we pronounce our own death sentence! It must necessarily be so, in order that we may hear the real, true message of Easter, which brings us news of an act of God that takes place when we are absolutely at the end of our resources, when nothing is left but damnation or grace.

And this message also begins with a “but — God”; yet this “but” is greater than our heart: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.”

When we hear these words, then even in the midst of our death, in the midst of our resistance we feel that there is a possibility, a divine possibility, that grace may have the last word and that it may break down our resistance and overcome our death. Then it no longer sounds incredible to us when Paul declares his belief that “God hath quickened us together with Christ — and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

This message tells of death that has been vanquished, of a new life and an eternal perfection — but of course, “together with Christ.” And so we must dare to believe that he who was crucified on Good Friday, he who rose again after three days, is, both now and forevermore, our living Lord.

AMEN.



## THOMAS

(*Quasimodo*)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.



But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord.

But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days, again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. — *John 20:24-29*



This Thomas, with his honest and outspoken doubt, as we see him in today's gospel lesson, is somehow or other particularly congenial and mentally akin to us German men and women who believe in Christ. The way in which he goes off alone with his trouble and tries to fight it out by himself; his refusal to let himself be influenced in his opinions by what other people say because he prefers to be free to make up his mind for himself; his manner of standing up, with a certain obstinate defiance, for his own principles and

conditions — all these things, as well as other less prominent traits in his character, appeal to us because they are so classically German and almost persuade us that this Gospel has some special message for us.

And there is something else that points in the same direction: we imagine that we see the reasons behind Thomas' doubt more clearly today than we did a few years ago. There is a certain similarity between the position of the band of disciples in the period following Easter and our position as a Christian community.

It was very easy for us to sing the hymn "Christ is risen" as long as everyone was really convinced that the Christian faith was preferable to any other and that it would in the long run conquer the whole world. We know, indeed, how even such an independent and outstanding spirit as Goethe was deeply imbued with the feeling that humanity would never outgrow the moral sublimity of the message of Christ. Thus our fathers and we ourselves have believed that it was permissible to infer the truth of the Bible message from the progressive victory of Christianity in the world, and thus be enabled, by means of our practical experience, to find and grasp and, to a certain extent, "see" the risen, living Christ.

But now this finding of Christ is shown to be but an illusion, for where is this victory in a day when the enemies of the cross are proclaiming to all the world that Jesus of Nazareth is really dead and that they will take care that he does not rise again from the dead?

You see, they have — as they had then — every power at their disposal. They enjoy full freedom to make speeches and hold meetings and are at liberty to call tens of thousands

together in the sports palace; and their purpose is to teach our nation, too, to join in the shout: "Away with this Jesus; we do not want him to reign over us! His blood be upon us and on our children!"

Meanwhile Christ's message is not allowed to be heard in public. It is banished behind the doors of the church, and in many cases it has even been driven from the church and confined to small groups of believers who gather behind locked doors without a shepherd or a teacher.

How long will this go on? Already in several congregations in Rhine-Hesse all meetings, including even Bible lessons and celebrations of the Lord's Supper, have been forbidden.

And so we get a quite new and direct insight into the mentality of the little band of disciples who met secretly behind locked doors "for fear of the Jews"; and Thomas' doubt assumes an entirely different aspect and importance in our eyes.

We are told that "Jesus lives; Jesus is victor." Yes, but can we seriously believe it? Does he really live? Does he, who vanquished death, leave his followers in terror and continue to give his enemies a free hand even now?

Anyone who is not familiar with this doubt and has not wrestled honestly with it, dear friends, should be careful when he speaks of his faith. Otherwise, when we are faced with this question — as might happen at any time now — it may possibly be made plain that this so-called faith is nothing but our own human work, a product of our reason and our strength, and that as a result it becomes weak and fails where we ourselves become weak and fail. In other words, we may find in the end that our faith is only a delusion which



may give us a feeling of strength and security but which fades away like mist in the moment of disillusionment.

Jesus has risen? Jesus lives? Jesus is the Lord?

The facts tell a different story, both to Thomas and to us: Jesus does not show himself; he remains hidden; he does not help us out of our distress. And merely because those ten declare, "We have seen the Lord," we are supposed to believe that they have really seen him, to believe in spite of all the facts and against all reason.

We cannot honestly do so, and if we did the result would be a very frail faith, a hesitating "perhaps" and very soon a violent, passionate "no!"

Therefore we will not blame Thomas. For surely he would have been only too glad to be comforted — this earnest, thoughtful, brooding man, who at an early stage saw Jesus' fatal doom approaching and said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him," and who anxiously wondered what he as a disciple had best do after Jesus' death: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" He needed comfort, in truth, and was well aware how greatly he needed it. But he also knew, and therein he remained incorruptibly honest, that no human word could give him certainty and strength, and that faith, in the sense of certainty and sustaining strength, never lies within human power, however strong our longing and however great our love may be. "I believe that it is not through my own reason or strength that I can believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him."

We will thank Thomas for teaching us — and we must learn from him — that faith must be able to say: "I am certain." Otherwise it is not faith. And thus faith needs the

living Lord himself, because no other person can give us such certainty.

False modesty is no help to us. Our faith does not die if we ask too much of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it very frequently languishes and degenerates because we do not dare to go the whole way, refusing to give in until we have been convinced or reconvinced. Yes, our faith dies as a result of our modesty, which, moreover, passes itself off as pious humility, as it did with King Ahaz of whom we read in Isaiah that he declined the offer of a sign from God with the pious words, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord."

Faith dies because we say to ourselves, "I will just leave everything to God; he will make everything all right." And behold, we no longer need God's word, and prayer is silenced, and the Lord Jesus Christ remains a stranger to us. We do not know whether he is dead or alive and we do not care either.

But we feel that Thomas is going too far and asking too much and that by delivering this ultimatum and speaking in this brutal manner he is pronouncing his own doom. Now, whatever we may think about it, the Lord Jesus Christ takes a different attitude. He knows that with Thomas the trouble comes from wanting to believe and yet not being able to believe. He knows that here there is an unsatisfied longing for peace and certainty, a longing so agonizing and so deep that only he himself can help; and he does help. He himself steps into the midst of his troubled and terrified disciples with the greeting, "Peace be with you!"

Then the way is opened for Thomas to believe. He hears Jesus' own word, he beholds the crucified Jesus alive again,

he sees the marks of the nails and puts his hand into Jesus' side, and knows — knows for certain — that he can and must believe, for Christ himself has said to him, "Be not faithless, but believing."

Is this a reproach, a painful reminder of one's own inability to believe? Yes, assuredly; and yet, no! It is much more than that. "He has said it, and therefore my heart dares to face life joyously and undismayed and refuses to be afraid of anything." "My Lord and my God!" — these words not only mean that Thomas has seen and known, has grasped and held Jesus; they express grateful praise and adoration; they show that Thomas has been gripped and held by Christ, that is, that he has a certain, yea, a living faith which stays and upholds him. "Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed."

Yea, Lord, I have seen thee; but that is not the whole truth: Thou hast seen me, thou hast spoken to me, thou hast helped me, and therefore I believe. It is thy work and thy gift. Now I know what thou meanest when thou dost say: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Thou art all, and thou alone!

And what do these words mean for our faith, dear brethren? Surely we, too, want to see, and we think that our faith is dependent upon our seeing. Our trouble is the same as Thomas'; and if the external oppression is not to be taken from us, if the Lord Jesus Christ continues to let his enemies work their will, so that a sigh goes through Christendom, "O Jesus Christ, thou art long in coming!" — do we not need at least a personal, a direct assurance that he lives and is near, and is that assurance possible without our seeing him?



“Blessed are they that have not seen” — they that are not dependent upon their eyes and senses — “and yet believe” — they that are dependent upon the living Christ.

Are we, then, to risk believing and hope for the best? Not at all, dear friends; we do not want that modesty which says, “I will not tempt the Lord.” We must put him to the test and see if he has spoken the truth; see if he is with us every day even unto the end of the world; see if his words are what he says they are: his spirit and his life, bearing witness to him and creating faith.

It is possible to believe without seeing, but not without his living and life-creating presence, not without the Holy Spirit. And that is why it is quite impossible to do without Jesus’ word. For it is through his word — and through his word alone — that the spirit works. “The Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel.” And therefore we cannot do without prayer while hearing the word; for in this word Jesus himself tells us, “My heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.” And so, dear friends, we will learn both these things in our time: a new way of hearing, so that we may prove that “tribulation teaches us to heed the word”; and a new way of praying, so that it may be fulfilled that “affliction teaches us to pray.”

Then today, too, and in our case, too, out of tribulation and affliction will grow that faith which is strength and life from God, and which therefore becomes praise and adoration: “My Lord and my God!”

AMEN.

# SUFFERING AND GLORY

*(Fourth Sunday after Trinity)*

Grace be unto you and peace from Him who is and was and ever will be! Amen.



The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

And if children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope;

Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

— *Rom. 8:16-27*



In one thing we are again brought quite near to the time of the apostles and the early Christians, so near that the gap of almost two thousand years of history seems closed, so

near that as we read the story of the apostles and the letters of the apostles the thought flashes through our minds with increasing frequency: "Verily, a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." For in our day people are again suffering with Christ and for Christ, and this suffering is necessarily bound up with the Christian faith and creed, and proves that the fellowship of Jesus is a fact and a reality in this world and is opposed to this world.

But this suffering is something quite different from what is generally known as suffering. Sickness and poverty and distress and death come to us as decrees of fate, without our being asked whether we want them or not. Such misery can always count upon sympathy. It creates solidarity and binds us to all that bears a human countenance. But the suffering with and for Christ means something else, and takes the form of contempt and shame and ignominy and persecution. Then the universal human sympathy gives way to scorn: "Why are the Christians so foolish? There is enough sorrow to be borne: why take upon oneself a cross which one could leave lying if he wished? To be sure, they do not have an easy time. To be sure, they are blamed for being reactionaries and disturbers of the peace. But why do they also talk so loudly and so obstinately of the one redemption through Jesus Christ, in a generation which thinks it has found another redemption?"

Is it any use at all, then, to keep on preaching the old message of repentance and faith today when no one listens because meanwhile it has become a dogma that we have already been properly converted and have returned to the right faith in our own strength?



No, we cannot count on human understanding and sympathy in the sufferings of this time. Here we are really being asked whether we will bear these sufferings as Christians believing only in the Lord Jesus Christ and his strength.

So once more we are brought quite near to Paul and his Christian congregations who fared no differently and no better. And this suffering is becoming a temptation to us, as it was to them. We wonder whether it is really necessary and whether it is worth while.

While we thus question, however, we are again conscious of the distance between the centuries, and we notice how difficult it is for us to give a definite answer and how far from self-evident such an answer is in our case — much more difficult, or so it seems to us, than for the Christians of those days who watched and waited for the Lord's second coming and who thought less about time and less about this transient and, as they thought, dying world, than of eternity, than of God's new creation in the perfect kingdom.

For us, however, time stretches out to eternity and the coming of the Lord recedes into the far distance. Our hope — if we dare speak of hope at all — lacks passion and strength, while suffering proves itself to be a hard fact which as time goes on oppresses and harasses and wearies us more and more.

Indeed we see no end to this suffering, no slackening of the enmity to Christ, no victory of faith over the world. On the contrary, the world has once again announced its unconditional claim to sovereignty and very plainly states that it will allow no one within its domain to treat seriously the authority of him who says of himself that "all power in heaven and in earth" is given unto him.

It strikes us as very strange that only a few decades ago the prevailing feeling was one of healthy optimism which had, it is true, more or less given up hope that Christ would come in power and glory, but which, on the other hand, believed all the more confidently in the superiority of the Christian religion and dreamed of the evolution of a Christian world as the fulfillment of the kingdom of God upon earth.

Even this hope has turned to water and we are left with the sufferings of this time. We are left with the question of whether it is really worth while — indeed, whether there is still any justification whatever for us to proclaim the message of Christ as God's good news to the whole world.

After all, what has changed, what has improved in the nineteen hundred years of Christ's mission? We may not express it as boldly as other people who say, "If I were God, I should do things differently," but nevertheless we, too, know a silent doubt and a feeling of tired resignation. Was it God — really God — who said, "Preach the gospel to every creature"? And was it God — really God — who promised that "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"?

What we hear and see surely tells an entirely different story. The world groans beneath the burden of its unredeemed sins, and in all its ups and downs and comings and goings there is neither sense nor purpose. For what difference, after all, do ups and downs and comings and goings make? It will all be the same in the end. "The creature," says the apostle, is "subject to vanity." It knows neither whence it comes nor whither it goes, nor of the why and wherefore of its existence. It lives as though its life had a meaning, and it passes away without having found the meaning of that life — and leaves nothing but a sigh.

But we ourselves are involved in this nothingness of growth and decay. By nature and as members of this creation we, too, live only in a state of seeming, for our existence and actions, our efforts and endeavors *seem* to be directed toward a goal. But this goal, too, is only an end after all, a dying and a passing away. "All is vanity!" And so here, too, nothing is left in the end but a sigh.

Can we wonder, then, if people call us Christians fools — fools, because we speak of redemption and yet have nothing to show for it; fools, because we proclaim a happy message for all and by so doing make an enemy of the whole world? Surely it is not worth while to suffer for such a doubtful cause! Why do we not rather proclaim that message which does not bind one to anything, but — or precisely because of that — costs nothing, neither scorn nor persecution: the message namely, that everyone should be saved in his own way?

Why are we, in spite of the sufferings we must undergo, Christians? Why do we preach — notwithstanding these things — that Jesus of Nazareth is the one Saviour of the world when after all we can see nothing which supports our hope, and when all the progress we once thought we saw has turned out to be error and delusion?

Dear brethren, we do not live by hope and we do not preach a mere hope. We live by faith and preach concerning what God does for us and to us through Christ. "I believe, therefore I speak" — thus says the Holy Scripture both in the Old and in the New Testament. And surely it is enough if I know that the message of the cross is meant for me, poor doomed creature that I am, in my weakness and wickedness, and that it declares me — with the whole authority of God — to be the child of the heavenly Father.



When I become certain of that fact from God's word, through God's Holy Spirit, I have found in faith a firm footing on which I can safely stand. Then the uncertain, wavering doubt as to life's meaning ceases. "If children, then heirs"; if we live by faith, then we live also in hope and trust that God does not do things by halves, but that he who "hath begun the good work in us" will "also perfect" it.

And now, above the suffering which we cannot escape and which is certainly no small matter, we have the incomparably greater thing, the "glory which shall be revealed in us," the real and perfect liberty of the children of God, which consists in the fact that we "shall live with him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence and bliss."

And it is of no consequence whether this perfection seems near or far from us, whether we look forward to it with fervor or quiet joy. The one thing that matters is that our Christian hope should be alive and genuine. And it is alive so long as it draws its strength from faith; and it is genuine so long as it lets itself be shown its goal by God's word. As for its certainty, that rests upon the promise of the Lord who has ascended up on high: "Behold, I make all things new!"

Where there is faith which nourishes its hope upon the Word and looks upon the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ, all the suffering of this time and all the groaning of the "creature" become the pointing finger. And this finger does not point—as the unbeliever says and as the man of little faith always fearfully believes—to the defectiveness of what is falsely called a happy message. This finger points to the perfection which is, to be sure, still wanting, but which must and will come as surely as our faith lives by the words and

deeds of God which have already been revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But faith in Christ has been promised a sight of Christ; and so our faith means that *we have not seen him yet*. Suffering with Christ has been promised dominion with him; and so our suffering at this time denotes that *we have not yet attained* that dominion. The groans will one day give way to the unanimous and many-voiced song of praise in honor of the redeemed creation in God's new world; and so all groaning is but a sign that *we have not yet reached* that state of rejoicing.

Assuredly our groaning is not over yet; the "creature" sighs under the consequences of the curse which God pronounced on it because of the fall of man — "Cursed is the ground for thy sake"; it is mishandled and misused in the service of human self-aggrandizement, and yet it was created for the honor of God, to show forth his praise.

We hear the groaning and know that it would rather be a song in praise of the Creator. We hear the groaning, and faith in the accomplished forgiveness of sins knows that the day of liberty is coming when every creature will be free to serve God joyfully.

And we Christian people groan too. Yes, we groan just because in faith we have already received a first gift from God, a foretaste of the full redemption and liberation; because we are pardoned and yet still know of sin and of rebellion against God's gracious and holy will. And so we wait in hope and patience for the perfecting act of God and long for it to be made manifest in us.

Yes, the Holy Spirit itself, which is bestowed upon us and

works faith in us and keeps faith living in us, according to Paul, joins in this groaning so that it may become not an impatient grumbling, but a yearning and a praying that find favor in the sight of God and that can be certain of a hearing from him.

Yes, God does his work until the end, and we must rely on that and believe confidently and happily that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

And may God strengthen our faith through this his word, so that we may hold fast to this truth!

AMEN.



# DEATH AND SIN, GRACE AND LIFE

*(Sixth Sunday after Trinity)*

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.



Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

— *Rom. 6:3-11*



Sin and death are the two realities in our human and earthly existence which we cannot grasp and with which we are consequently unable to cope. They are the hard facts on which the life of the individual and the life of the nations come hopelessly to grief and are destroyed. They are the words which must remain unsaid, because they insult good taste, banish our peace of mind and destroy all our dreams.

Any other kind of question or problem, want or distress,

hope or aim we tackle with reasonable hope for success; and if *we* do not succeed, our children or our children's children surely will. But — sin and death! There is something sinister about these words. We feel that they are restraining fetters. We see in them a barrier which we cannot pass. All men must die and all have sinned.

It is really not to be wondered at that we do our utmost to move in such a way that we do not feel these shackles and do not see the barrier. In the period from which we have just emerged we brought this art to a remarkable degree of perfection and lived quite peacefully as though there were neither sin nor death. If, however, they happened to come so close to us that we felt menaced by them, we probably grasped at the faith of our fathers, at the comfort of the Christian religion, or at some other means of restoring our peace of mind as quickly as possible.

Dear friends, I cannot regard it as a bad thing that the days of such a placid life and such a more than modest "piety" — for that is what we called it — have gone never to return.

We are shocked when we hear or read with what abysmally deep hatred the struggle is being waged and attacks are being launched against the truth of the Bible and the Christian faith; but is that not really because we are afraid for our conventional, peaceful, bourgeois Christian existence? Is not this hatred rather a hopeful sign that our generation cannot cope with the realities revealed by Christ's message and that the sinister element is becoming so pervasive that our generation cannot ignore it? Sin and death!

Why must each death of which we speak be called heroic, and why do we always speak of the life of our nation and

empire as eternal? Because we know death and yet do not know it; we find the naked skeleton so gruesome that we must needs drape a cloak round it.

Why do people fight with such passion against the idea of sin, especially original sin, if these are only the meaningless abstractions they are said to be? Why the heavy artillery? Because we know sin and yet do not know it, for its reality eludes our grasp and so we must needs declare it a specter.

We might add that in speaking thus of sin and death we are merely making a last effort to deal with them, so that we may not resign ourselves to the inevitable but rebel against the sinister reality of these two forces. "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." But now that this insurrection against sin and death is in full swing, now that no day passes but that the battle alarm penetrates into our very homes and into our very hearts, we can no longer act the part of carefree and indifferent spectators. For we are being challenged to give an account of whether we really know a way of escape from the dismal prison of death and sin, or whether, on the contrary, we are not — and this is the reproach leveled against the Christian church — from generation to generation breeding a race of broken-spirited slaves, who "through fear of death" must be "all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Does our faith only mean we are convinced that, so far as we human beings are concerned, sin and death are inescapable realities which we must accept whether we like them or not, but that somehow and sometime God will have a day of reckoning with these sinister powers — as he has already once done in the life and sufferings, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ? If we believe this, and yet



to all intents and purposes everything has remained and continues to remain as it always was, and we are content to have it so, are not our enemies justified, and must we not admit that they are justified, when they accuse our faith of being nothing but a makeshift, a virtue born of necessity, and therefore of questionable value?

Yes, do not we Christians ourselves take the sinister reality of sin and death much too lightly when we think that all we need do with regard to them is to quote such a religious conviction?

The sworn enemies of the Christian faith are quite right, after all, in feeling that when we speak of sin and death and God in the same breath we are in an impossible position. We are suspended over a bottomless abyss at the end of a frayed rope, and, terrified and horror-stricken, are watching the strands break one after the other.

Sin means that I — man — am rebelling against God, the creature against the Creator. And I cannot help it; it is my nature that I should claim a right to my own will—even and indeed precisely as opposed to God's will.

And the fact that I act thus not only in isolated cases, the fact that I am my own God and Lord, is the original sin which Luther has called the "most wicked and profound corruption." And the Holy Scriptures call death the "wages of sin" and thereby testify to us that God watches the rebellion of his creature, who himself wants to be God, only for a little while, and then lets it taste his anger and its own impotence.

Can one really consent to this state of affairs and still remain calm? Is not such calmness the laziness and thoughtlessness of a humdrum, easygoing existence which feels quite

comfortable at the moment and consoles itself with regard to the future by saying that things probably won't be so bad after all?

Dear brethren, the insurgents in their rebellion against slavery are certainly nearer to God than are the complacent and lukewarm Christians in their levity.

We are being asked about our faith; not for our views and opinions, but for proof of its spirit and strength. Have we the courage, in full consciousness of what it means, to stand opposed to the rebellion against the Triune God and to accept and testify to the sinister reality of sin and death, remembering with what supreme gravity God's Word speaks of this reality?

To do so, however — and this is the central question on which everything depends — is to ask: Do we know and can we bear witness to another reality which is able to deal with sin and death because it is grace and life? Or do we move in the kingdom of uncertain hopes and empty dreams?

One fact at least is sure: a cross stood before the gates of Jerusalem, and we are baptized in the name of him who hung and died upon that cross. The apostle reminds the Christian congregation at Rome of that fact and adds that by that baptism we win a personal share in Jesus' death on the cross. Paul illustrated this point with the vigorous baptismal custom of the ancient Christians which consisted of the complete immersion of the candidate in the baptismal water: "You are wholly baptized into the death of Christ, completely dead and buried with him. His death is your death!" We know that this picture of baptism itself is not the important thing, for of course it is not the water that does it, but "the word of God which is with the water

and in the water, and the faith which trusts this word of God."

And this is the word which matters to us, which, if we hear and believe it, makes the death of Jesus our own. "For you!"

And with each of us in baptism, our "old man" is crucified, dead and buried with him. And so sin loses its power and its claim, for "he that is dead has no more obligations, but is freed from sin."

When I take it as God's word to me, when in penitence and faith I accept the fact that Jesus Christ of his own free will has died the death which I was bound to die because of my sin and the anger of God, I myself, as the "old man" who was I, as a sinner, have really died with him. For there is no longer any serious possibility of sin as a rebellion against God's will if this very same holy God against whom I have sinned meets me in the form of forgiving love in his Son.

This grace of God, which is the very opposite of indulgent weakness and is a love stronger than death, is able to cope with sin; for it strikes at sin's root in the secret depths of our being, where dwells original sin, where our ego has set up its throne and will bear no other gods beside it.

Moreover, what is true of the death of Jesus Christ—that if we believe in his word we take part in his death as in our own death—is equally true of his resurrection—that we shall live with him. And this life with him is likewise a present reality: we "shall walk in newness of life," in free and childlike obedience, in the faith which rejoices in peace with God and says, "I delight to do thy will, O God!"

The question is whether this new life can cope with death. That is no question so far as faith is concerned, for faith



knows that Christ lives and that the sovereignty of death is tottering. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

And yet — there is one last "but" left — we still know of sin, of real and painful guilt, and we still know of a death we must die like all other men, and the length of our life is a secret with Christ and God. We are still on the way, we are still in the battle. The "old man" must daily be crucified and die, and must daily come forth and arise as a new man who will live in everlasting righteousness and purity in the sight of God. "We walk by faith, not sight." Thus we are referred back daily to the crucified and risen Lord, so that we must let ourselves be led and sustained by him, but also so that we may daily hear and obey his word, "Reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God." Then sin and death lose their terror — Luther speaks of the death through which we as believers must pass as a "little death" and as a "sweet death" — and we go forward to meet life as redeemed men and women, passing from strength to strength. May God's grace help us to do so!

AMEN.

## LIFT UP A STANDARD

*(Seventh Sunday after Trinity)*

Grace, mercy and peace be with you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.



I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

The Lord hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast labored:

But they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the Lord; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness.

Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.

Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

And they shall call them the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, a city not forsaken. — *Isa. 62:6-12*



In these prophetic words to Jerusalem God speaks to his people who have returned from the Babylonian captivity but have already lost the first joy over their regained freedom and are now plunged in deep despondency. To be sure, they were again in the land of their fathers; they again served the living God in his temple which had been rebuilt from the ruins. But the great and glowing hopes with which the people of the captivity had looked forward to this time had not been fulfilled. Jerusalem remained a desolate, half-

forsaken city; houses and palaces stood untenanted; the walls lay in ruins and, far from offering any protection against hostile attacks, frankly invited the attention of marauders. Because of these circumstances the stream of returning exiles had ceased, and on those who had already returned lay the oppressive burden of disappointment, and people bore in silence what they could not alter.

A paltry little incident from the great panorama of world history, and from the annals of a strange nation and a strange land. What have these things to do with us? They all belong to the Old Testament, and we are daily told that we shall only make ourselves ridiculous if we spend time on it, that we shall lose caste among our contemporaries if we continue to take it seriously.

Now, it is undoubtedly possible to set forth a number of reasons for treating the Old Testament with reverence. It contains a great wealth of evidence of genuine piety. Not only did Jesus pray in the words of the Old Testament Psalms, but men like Luther and Paul Gerhardt used the words of these Psalms in their hymns, which are still alive among us. It is also rightly pointed out that the message of the New Testament is intimately bound up with the history that preceded it, with the word of the law and the prophets, and that the Old Testament was Jesus' Bible.

But that is not conclusive, for after all there is evidence of genuine piety even outside the Old Testament, and perhaps there are also other ways of gaining an understanding of the New Testament. The final proof is that the Old Testament is also God's word, in which the Triune God makes himself known in his grace and truth, in mercy and judgment; in which the Father testifies to his people through



the Holy Spirit concerning Jesus Christ, so that his people may hear and believe and obey. And since Israel has ceased to be God's people, because it refused to hear and believe and obey, God's word goes through the world and gathers a new Israel in the church of Christ, which has now entered upon the inheritance. That is why we know that it is we who are being addressed when in the Old Testament we hear God calling Jerusalem or Zion. It is the church of Jesus Christ which is meant to pay heed to such words. For how does the apostle Peter put it: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people"!

So in place of that picture from the remote past of which we were reminded, we have the immediate and living present in which we as a Christian community have been set. We too have just come from a Babylonian captivity of the church, when the word of God had to serve strange masters and to proclaim the glory of man instead of the honor of God, and it has truly been a miracle performed before our eyes to see how the fetters broke like frayed ropes, without our intervention; how in spite of all the enticements of the new false doctrine and in spite of all the threats of those who proclaim it we have escaped from slavery and found our way home; how God's word is being preached among us purely and simply as the happy message of the salvation which God has prepared for us in Jesus Christ, so that we may honor him.

Of course, the first joy in our case, too, long since has given way to a feeling of disillusionment. We now see how small is the number of the returned exiles. We can no longer conceal from ourselves how the great majority of those who be-

came members of Christ by baptism prefer to be slaves and to serve strange gods. Jerusalem is deserted.

And now we see too how uncertain our own existence as a Christian community has become. We sow, but who reaps? We plant, but who gathers in the fruit? What will become of our young people whom we instruct and confirm?

There is talk of "deconfessionalizing" our nation, but it is becoming clearer from day to day that the enemies of Jesus Christ are deliberately using all their influence and all their power to deprive our people both of their church and of their Christianity.

What is the good, then, of sowing and planting, when there can be no harvest? We are defenseless against the attack of the enemy and must be glad if we merely manage to exist from day to day. The walls are destroyed, and a fearful despondency, a terrified silence seeks to lay hold on us. Perhaps we can live undisturbed a little while longer in some dark corner. Perhaps we ourselves can at least continue to live and die as Christians.

But listen, dear friends, God does not want us to bow to what seems to be the inevitable; God does not want us to await the end of his church in silent resignation. It is thus that unbelief acts, which looks upon what is visible and fails when it finds nothing to which it can cling. It is thus that "little faith" acts, which possibly tries to do something when it is called upon, but is seized with terror and gives way to doubt when a strong wind begins to blow.

To be sure, we see nothing today to which we can cling. To be sure, a strong and cutting wind is blowing against us, and we have no idea when and how we are to be rescued. Nevertheless, faith must here be strong and of good courage,

because it knows that whatever the eye may see and whatever the heart may say God's word and promise are behind it. God does not wash his hands of the work of his church. He has sworn, "I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast labored." He has promised that his "word shall not return unto him void" but that "it shall prosper in the thing whereto he sends it." How should we dare to be silent when God wants his word to be proclaimed — regardless of whether we consider the proclamation to be in season or out of season?

Though the walls may lie in ruins, our first duty is not to build them up again. Though only a few of us are left in the church which acknowledges Christ to be the one Lord, the one thing needful above all others is not that we should be many. It really does not matter whether it is two years or two decades before the church regains its internal and external peace — for we cannot bring about that peace! Nor does it matter whether the new paganism wins a few more hundred thousands of adherents — for we cannot prevent that from happening! But surely it is of the greatest importance whether the will of God has so much power over us that, regardless of the danger which may be involved, we let ourselves be posted as watchmen on the ruined walls and, caring nothing for the hatred and enmity of men, bear witness to what we are commanded to proclaim in the name of Jesus, through whom God opens up our way to repentance and faith. In order that this message may be made known by us, the Lord has promised that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church. In order that we may not keep



silent concerning this word God has pledged that "Jerusalem will be established and made a praise in the earth."

A church that believes in Christ can therefore wait in patience and steadfastness until it pleases God to give it peace. It need not, indeed it dare not, purchase that peace with concessions. And a church that believes in Christ is free from the agonizing unrest and anxiety of wondering whether it is winning the masses and whether it has them on its side or not, for it lives not by the favor of men, but by the grace of God.

It is indeed necessary that we let that fact be impressed upon us, for the devil is going about among us today trying to persuade us that the time of the church is past because the mighty ones of this world have withdrawn their favor from it, and it must now resign itself, whether it likes or not, to a ghetto existence. That idea is thought and spoken as though God were not God and as though men were in a position to obstruct his work and to fetter his word.

But God does not let himself be put upon the defensive. He does not let his word be shut up within church walls. "Go through the gates! Prepare ye the way of the people!" Surely that command does not sound as if God were thinking of giving up his claim. No matter how many obstacles may be piled up, no matter how large the stones which are rolled across the path to keep out the word of God, "Is not my word like as a fire," said the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"

It is not for us to ask how much trust we have in ourselves. But it is for us to answer whether we trust God's word to be God's word and to do what it says.

We may well be discouraged and despondent when we hear the strong words with which war is today being declared upon "Jah, the demon of the wilderness." It may frighten us to see how the roads which used to lead our nation to the living God are one after the other being choked with débris. How shall we clear a path there? How are we to move away the stones? It is no use; we can never manage it. No, *we* cannot!

But is that how we are placed, after all? "Lay hold upon the Word," says Martin Luther, "and then thou shalt not be alone!" If that word has grown too powerful for us, so that we must bow down to it because we can no longer hold out against the holy love of God, because it has proved itself, in the message of the cross of Jesus Christ, to be a divine force, how shall we doubt that it will also succeed in dealing with all other opposition? We need not worry about the result; we need not ask whether the time of the gospel is perhaps past after all. It is not passing away: "Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him." Our one anxiety must be to pay heed to God's word and to believe it and to proclaim it and bear witness to it. The faith and loyalty of each and all of us are at stake!

AMEN.

# OF THE TEMPTATION OF THE CHURCH

*(Ninth Sunday after Trinity)*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all! Amen.



Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;  
And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;  
And did all eat the same spiritual meat;  
And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ.

But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

—*I Cor. 10:1-13*



Dear brethren, does not what the apostle tells us here about the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness



strike us as being very far-fetched? And the manner in which he speaks of these happenings seems to us extremely artificial and peculiar. It is true that we hear the warning in them, but we feel that this warning is weakened rather than strengthened and obscured rather than illuminated by the arguments which precede it. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!" And yet we grasp the meaning of this message immediately; and if we still need special proof, we certainly find within our own experience plenty of instances which make us realize how much cause we have to remain awake and to take care. For daily we stumble and fall; and who among us does not know how prone we human beings are to temptation, nay, who does not know of temptations which have caused us to fall so that we bear the scars of our falling for the rest of our lives!

We have good reason indeed to take the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer very seriously and to pray daily that God will bless us and keep us so that we may not fall and perish in "unbelief, despair and other great infamies and vices."

The fact is that every day we have to deal anew with our old Adam, who refuses to die; we have to deal with our natural heart, which defies the will of God and is secretly afraid of itself; and we have to deal with the world around us, which imposes its law upon us. And at this very moment we feel the oppression of the world in which we are forced to live, and of its law which has power over us. And unbelief and despair are very, very near us. When we consider whether we are still able to live as Christians in a world which sets up its law in open opposition to the law of God — and there is no doubt that the way leads more and more clearly in that direction — we can no longer comfort our-

selves with the quotation, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." For we know that here is something more than the testing and proving of the individual such as the Lord Jesus Christ asks of every human life which desires to belong to him. Here it is becoming obvious that in the struggle in which we are involved everything is at stake and God and Satan are wrestling with each other for the mastery.

Up till now we have lived as Christians who had to fight a brave and honest battle in this world and in this life, and while so doing we have probably felt that there is a last, still unsettled tension between the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, to which we are called by faith, and the kingdom of this world, to which we belong by our physical and earthly existence. Yet for generations we have lived under the delusion that this final antagonism was being silently wiped out and that there was no longer danger of a serious clash.

To be sure, we have a text about the "last things"; we are told that Christ will return to "judge the quick and the dead," and we speak of an "end of the world" and a "last day." But we have grown accustomed to putting these events away from us into a far-off, remote future which does not affect us today. We live and act as though, until further notice, God and the world had agreed to make common cause.

And now we see with some horror that this happy situation does not exist; that our personal struggle for a Christian life in faith and obedience is not enough, for we are being drawn into a titanic battle between heaven and hell, between God and the devil, between angels and demons.

The world is coming to an end, and we are in the midst

of the upheaval. For that dream of which we have just spoken is really nothing but a dream. Since the world put the Christ of God to death upon the cross and since God gave him the sovereign power the world has been out of joint, and the devil is loose, because God's judgment has begun.

Now we are fighting for the cross — for faith or unbelief, for the sovereignty of the crucified Christ or the sovereignty of the prince of this world. And we must not dream of peace. Indeed we must not even hope for a truce. We must realize clearly that we are being called upon to make a last bid for victory by the message of the cross which saves us from the power of the world and its prince and gives us the peace of God, lest we perish in this final battle with its more than human temptations.

Because the judgment passed upon the world began with the cross of Jesus Christ, and because through that cross the end of worldly arrogance is now drawing nigh, the devil must go out after the whole world, for he gains nothing by causing isolated individuals to fall or stray into unbelief (though he certainly continues to do that and enjoys doing it). But he cannot rest until the message itself has been silenced. And so his hatred is directed against the whole of Christendom and his temptations are aimed at the church which preaches and spreads the word.

Possibly the world can tolerate individual Christians, possibly it can tolerate the principle that each individual must be saved in his own way; but as long as it wants to be itself it cannot seriously want the church of the cross, but must fight against it in one way or another. And the more determinedly the world approves of itself, the more sharply must it resist a message based upon the belief that this world must pass



away, nay more, that the judgment of God has already been pronounced upon it.

It is to no purpose, dear brethren, to act as though we had to bring to the world the long-desired golden age of untrammelled sovereignty. The gospel is called “good news” because in place of the sovereignty of the world it sets the supreme power of God and in Christ opens to us the door through which we are to enter into the kingdom of God in penitence and faith.

As Christians we have no claim upon the gratitude or sympathy of a world which believes in itself and its own superiority. The world must feel that our faith and our preaching set us far apart from it. Jesus is surely right when he tells us, “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.”

And so there is no place in this world where we as Christians are truly at home. In the Israel of the Old Testament, which God leads into the desert in order to bring it into the Promised Land, we recognize ourselves as the church and chosen people of the Lord Jesus Christ. And though we may find it strange that Paul sees baptism foreshadowed in the fact that God, concealed in a cloud, leads the children of Israel through the sea, and that he connects the manna from heaven and the water from the rock with the presence of Christ in the holy sacrament, one thing is brought very forcibly home to us — that the majority of the people, in spite of the great deeds and the rich gifts of God, did not reach the goal but came to grief in the temptations of this road through the wilderness.

There lies the warning which is meant for us. We owe the fact that we as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ have been freed from bondage and that sin, death and the devil have no more power over us, to God’s act of redemption, to

which we have been admitted through baptism. We owe the fact that we as a church of Christ live in the midst of this world of death to the gifts of God which nourish our faith and which are never wanting — the gifts of the word and the sacrament.

But the earthly path of the church lies through the wilderness, and that path is full of pitfalls. And these pitfalls tempt not only this individual or that, but the whole company of the people of God, of the gospel, of the right faith and love and hope. For the world knows that these things menace it, and so it attacks them, trying to make the church renounce its allegiance to its Lord and return to its former state of bondage.

Today we understand anew that we as a church are wandering in the wilderness and that we are utterly separated from this world and its desires. We know also the distress which this wandering means for us. That distress comes not only from the fact that we are looked upon with distrust and hatred, but also — and no less — from the fact that in following our way we are becoming homeless upon the earth.

We long to be able to enjoy life. We long for human fellowship and for a tangible aim. But these things can be had only at the price of giving up the Lord Jesus Christ and ceasing to be his church. The suggestion that we do so is being pressed upon us today. The tempter knows how to make it seem very attractive. We are told that the Lord Jesus Christ will of course be given his rights beside the golden calf, and that Christian brotherly love will of course continue to be recognized along with the fellowship of the nation which is bound together by blood, and that there will be room for eternity also when this life of time is over. But in

that *also* lies the devilish temptation which is seeking to win victory for the world over the church of Christ.

And Satan comes with threats to the church which refuses to listen to his tempting voice. Threats are now the order of the day, and it must be admitted that they have long ceased to be human temptation in the sense that they aim at ruining only this individual or that. No, they are aimed at the whole of God's people, and are intended to bring it to idolatry. They are aimed at the tens of thousands, at the hundreds of thousands, to make them desert God's commands. Everything is at stake: heaven and hell, and the end of the world which must choose between God and Satan. And so "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Once again, dear brethren: everything is at stake, even — and particularly — for us as the church of the message of the cross. For it is finally a question of this cross. It is at this point that the hottest battle is fought, a battle in which our sole support is the loyalty of God who gave his only-begotten Son for us and to us. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it!"

AMEN.



## YE WOULD NOT!

*(Tenth Sunday after Trinity)*

Grace be unto you and the peace of Him that was and is and is to come! Amen.



Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

— *Matt. 23:34-39*



One of the most marked features of the present time is that a new and energetic attempt is being made to subdue life as a whole, with all its cares and sorrows, with all its riddles and problems, by laying hold on it firmly and boldly.

As we look back at the period which lies behind us we are depressed to see that no valiant effort was ever made to master the constantly increasing difficulties, but that we got more and more into the way of allowing ourselves to be carried along by the current of events. Hence the longing for a complete change in our way of thinking; hence the passionate determination to tackle our problems with all the strength that

remains to us and to create something new. In these circumstances it is not to be wondered at that even the religious forces and powers in our nation should be weighed and assessed to see whether they are willing to serve this determination and its aim.

Consequently, there is talk among us today of a "positive" Christianity, or recently also of a "positive" religion — which means that even in the domain of religion we consider anything to be *positive* which helps us realize and stabilize our great aim of becoming a united, strong and proud nation. Anything that does not serve that aim is of no interest to us; anything that opposes it must be eliminated.

Thus it happens that at the present time all religious doctrine and teaching is being subjected to inexorable criticism in order to discover whether it is useless or negative from the positive or practical standpoint, whether it is an obstacle to our ultimate national aim. And so it also happens that for years the well meant counsel has been pressed upon us to adapt the Christian message to our new position and task, and to reform the faith and bring it into line with a "positive" Christianity.

What the "reformers" have in mind is, first and foremost, a more vigorous exposition of Jesus' preaching, insofar as that preaching demands an incomparable moral heroism and so mobilizes the last moral reserves in us and grips us by its appeal to our moral integrity. They are thinking also of the ideal picture of Jesus' personality, in which the heroism he demands has found its perfect realization in service, sacrifice and devotion.

On the other hand, the establishing of these demands in the approaching kingdom of God, or the establishing of

that unique personality in the equally unique relation to God of the man Jesus, whom we believe to be the only-begotten Son of the Father, seems to them of no account. These matters must and may, therefore, be left to the individual to believe or not as he pleases.

The "reformers" talk also of a definitely "negative" Christianity, which is consistently to be denied and, where it shows itself, to be resisted — and the presence of this "negative" Christianity is suspected wherever the ideal of the free, strong and proud man is violated, wherever the doctrines of sin and forgiveness, of repentance and grace, and of the crucified and risen Christ as the one and only Saviour are preached. For this message undermines our morale and prevents us from believing with supreme and absolute certainty in the success of our worldly efforts and in the stability of our work. Grace and forgiveness — that means that it is not we who are the authors of our fortune, and that however much we may strain and strive we are not able to determine success and its duration. Sin and repentance — that surely means that the last and decisive word is spoken by someone else — by God, who alone has power to grant forgiveness or to refuse grace.

Shall we bow down to him, or must we not rather resist him if we pursue the aims of our "positive" Christianity? That is the question with which we, in common with our whole nation, are again faced. Do we want a Christianity which we can use to further our own plans and aims, or do we want the Lord Jesus Christ who reveals the plans and aims of God to us? Which is to be the criterion: our claim on God or God's claim on us? Is God's will to conform to our will, or is our will to conform to the will of God?



Today is the tenth Sunday after Trinity, a day which has for centuries been dedicated in the Christian world to the memory of the destruction of Jerusalem and the fate of the Jewish people; and the gospel lessons of this Sunday throw a light upon the dark and sinister history of this people which can neither live nor die because it is under a curse which forbids it to do either.

We speak of the "eternal Jew" and conjure up the picture of a restless wanderer who has no home and who cannot find peace. We see a highly gifted people which produces idea after idea for the benefit of the world, but whatever it takes up becomes poisoned, and all that it ever reaps is contempt and hatred because ever and anon the world notices the deception and avenges itself in its own way. I say "in its own way," for we know full well that there is no charter which would empower us to supplement God's curse with our hatred. Even Cain receives God's mark, that no one may kill him; and Jesus' command, "Love your enemies!" leaves no room for exceptions. But we cannot change the fact that until the end of its days the Jewish people must go its way under the burden which Jesus' decree has laid upon it: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

And so, it seems to me, we are left with the realization that this people, in its impossible existence, will remain proof of the fact that to the Lord Jesus Christ "all power is given, in heaven and in earth."

What is the reason for this punishment which has lasted for thousands of years? Dear brethren, the reason is easily given: the Jews brought the Christ of God to the cross. But

we must not utter these words with an undertone of human and moral reproach. For we may render ourselves liable to the same doom if we endorse the verdict of censure without examining it.

I cannot help saying quite harshly and bluntly that the Jewish people came to grief and disgrace because of its positive Christianity. It bears a curse throughout the history of the world because it was ready to approve of its Messiah just as long and as far as it thought it could gain some advantage for its own plans and aims from him, his words and his deeds. It bears a curse because it rejected him and resisted him to the death when it became clear that Jesus of Nazareth would not cease calling to repentance and faith, despite their insistence that they were free, strong and proud men and belonged to a pure-blooded, race-conscious nation: "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man!" Jesus paid no heed. In spite of their earnest piety he still called upon them to repent, and demanded faith in the name of God, and made salvation dependent upon himself: "No man cometh unto the Father but by me!" He thus proclaimed the message of the grace of God for the sinner who repents as the gospel which had become a reality in him.

Here positive Christianity, which the Jewish people wanted, clashed with negative Christianity, as Jesus himself represented it; the pious will of man came into conflict with the will of God. "How often would I have gathered thy children together, but ye would not." The choice has been made; the people whom God has followed with his mercy and his judgment, to whom he has again and again shown his gracious and holy will, to whom he has finally sent his

Son with the joyful message of the forgiveness of sin and the peace of a new life in his kingdom — that people has chosen its own way and will and has counted the forgiveness of sins as nothing.

Now it bears the curse. Because it rejected the forgiveness it drags about the frightful burden of the unforgiven blood-guilt of its fathers. The blood of all the righteous men who were ever murdered because they testified to the holy will of God against tyrannical human will has come upon its head, as well as the blood of Jesus and the blood of all his messengers.

But who can keep on hating when God's judgment is in full force!

It should make us frightened and anxious to realize that we and our nation face the same question of negative or positive Christianity. A man to whom hundreds of thousands of people listen today — an upright, devout man who is thoroughly bent upon establishing a positive religion — has bluntly declared that "Jesus Christ is not to be taken over into the new German faith."

Yes, friends, can we risk going with our nation without forgiveness of sins, without that so-called negative Christianity which, when all is said and done, clings in repentance and faith to Jesus as the Saviour of sinners? I cannot and you cannot and our nation cannot. "Come, let us return unto the Lord!"

The danger has grown to gigantic proportions in our time. Let us wrestle and pray that our people may not lack that handful of righteous men whose sins have been forgiven for Christ's sake, so that God may be gracious to it, so that he



may not speak the conclusive last word, “Ye would not!” but may give us still more time to hear the word which calls us to Christ as the Saviour of sinners.

Lord, have mercy, have mercy upon us! In thee alone we hope — let us not stray from thee!

AMEN.

# THE OFFICE OF THE CHURCH

*(Twelfth Sunday after Trinity)*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all! Amen.



Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

And such trust have we through Christ to Godward:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. — *II Cor. 3:1-6*



At first glance, dear brethren, it certainly looks as though this text had little or no connection with us. Paul is here defending the authority of his apostolic office against the reproach of presumption. His opponents seem to have accused him of having no lawful authority for his actions and of trying to make up for this lack — as can be understood only too well from the human standpoint — by pushing his personal accomplishments and merits unduly into the foreground.

The apostle is defending himself, or rather he is defending his office, against this charge, and because he has to deal with opponents who, being of Jewish origin, set a particularly

high value on the law, Paul here contrasts the New and the Old Testaments.

But we feel that this incident is of only historical importance and that this is one of those desolate stretches of Scripture where we find no living springs. And yet it only seems so, for Paul is after all not just anybody; he is the apostle of Jesus Christ, and his office did not end with his work on earth but is still being fulfilled in our midst today through the service of the church.

If the campaign against Paul has been resumed in our day, if after nineteen hundred years the legitimacy of his apostolic office is again being questioned, and if it is spread abroad that this Paul falsified the teaching and message of Jesus of Nazareth, then we are directly affected in the highest degree. For this attack is not directed against the man who died a martyr under Emperor Nero and was buried in Rome, but against the apostle and his message — that is, against the church and its teaching.

We are now being asked — not we pastors alone, but we, the church — whence comes our power and on what authority we base what we say and do. Therefore we are in the same position and are faced with the same accusation as Paul. Yes, our text now becomes unpleasantly relevant to present-day affairs. For we are being asked for our passport, as it were, to prove that our existence is justified, or at least for a letter of recommendation on the basis of which the church may be given favorable treatment, or for a statement binding us to take into account the criticism which is being leveled at the church and its message.

What do these demands mean? And what is behind them?



Today in every town and province there is a loud cry that the Christian church free itself from the dead formulas and dogmas with which no one wants anything more to do, and in their place preach a Christianity of life and action. If that were done, we are told, if the church would only understand and follow the signs of the times, it would be possible to recommend it and to further its interests; it would be possible to hold out to it prospects of an influential place within the framework of our national life; indeed, it would be possible to promise it an assured future with far-reaching possibilities for its work.

A Christianity of life and action, a "positive" Christianity — was not that, they say, the whole aim of the founder of the Christian religion? Was not that the whole aim of Jesus of Nazareth himself? And does not his message reach its climax in the assertion that "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"? Surely the church should understand and should again proclaim that life and action are the important things, as against those abstractions such as Paul was the first to push into the foreground — sin and grace, faith and justification; abstractions which again and again have become dead formulas and dogmas.

And today the times are exceptionally favorable for such reform. The men and women of our day long for guidance and yearn for fixed standards against which to measure their desires and actions. And the question of the law of God, of his ordinances and commands with regard to our life in this world, is waiting for an answer — for the answer of the church.

And how much could be done if the church would free

itself of its antiquated notions, if it would accept the watch-words of the day and the prevailing philosophy of life! Undreamed-of prospects would open up! Perhaps the words "state and church," which sound discordant today, would again produce an effect somewhat like that of the old magic formula "throne and altar," for which kings and priests alike had such a fondness in days gone by. That truly would be no bad recommendation!

And after all, in former periods the church was not so scrupulous when it came to adapting its message to the spirit of the times. By practicing "positive" Christianity, in the sense of accepting today's philosophy of life which has its core in a national morality, we should at once be free of all theological controversy and all clerical squabbling. The confessional schism would disappear almost of itself, instead of growing, as it does today. For the individual would be left to decide quietly for himself from which eternal or temporal, divine or human sources he would draw such a "positive" Christianity.

However, we are not in a position to accept such a recommendation. So long as we call ourselves the church we are not free in what we preach or do, but are bound to the Lord of the church to whom belongs the office in which we stand. The Lord Jesus Christ has ordered us to "teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." We cannot pick out the parts of his teaching that suit us and suppress the parts that do not suit us. On the contrary, we must deliver the whole message as it is given to us. For the rest, we must wait and see what comes of it and what the Lord Jesus Christ does with it through our service.

And so there is nothing to recommend the church and its

message to humanity but the congregation itself, for through it Christ speaks. The preaching of Christ is no dead doctrine. It creates new life. In this message there lives a mysterious but real power which is not called forth from man of his own volition but comes as a gift from God.

Now and then this mysterious power of the gospel becomes visible, and men marvel at the courage and love, the steadfastness and self-sacrifice displayed by the Christian community. And so Paul can say to the congregation at Corinth, "Ye are our epistle, known and read of all men; forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us."

"Known and read of all men" — there our misery begins. There doubt takes up its abode in our hearts. For surely this power of the Christian community to testify to Christ has become pitifully weak and uncertain.

It is true that the Lord praised his disciples by saying, "Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world." Yet the reality seems to tell an entirely different story. And whose fault is it? The church's, they say, because it is antiquated; its formulas are out of date, its dogmas are dead. It must be brought back into touch with the times and with life.

Oh, we have known that for a long time! New programs, new ideas, new ideals! For the past hundred years and more the church has been running after the spirit of the times with the plea for a "letter of recommendation." It has secured such a letter too, but each time it has had to pay for it with a portion of the gospel and each time it has received in exchange a foreign ideal. There has been less and less talk of what God does to us through Jesus Christ, but more and more



eloquence about what we ourselves must do or would like to do.

And all such talk has been of no avail. Nor could it be of any avail. For we were on the wrong road all the time. We are not concerned here with the contrast between doctrine and life, nor with replacing a dead dogma by life and action. But we are concerned with the division between the law and the gospel, and the question is whether we wish to assert our independence of God by trying to make him obey while we command. We are brought back to the Old Testament, where God's inexorable will confronts us. And the more clearly and plainly this will is revealed to us, the more hopeless become our attempts to master it, the more impossible is it for us to maintain our independence of and our opposition to God. For his will becomes a judgment, paralyzing our actions and delivering us up to death: "The letter killeth."

The fact that we must share in this death if we would follow Christ is why Jesus so harshly opposes all attempts to weaken the gospel and to render God's commandments innocuous. And that is why he lets his messengers and his whole church, with all their beautiful programs and ideas, suffer shipwreck. Only in that way can we become ripe for the message of the New Testament, the message which leaves us no independence with regard to God, but which is called "good news" because it wakes us from death to new life, because it gives doubting, despairing men and women a living hope, because it brings sinners the forgiveness of God and the peace of God, because, finally, it tells us of Jesus as the Saviour, as Paul and the apostles told us, on whom we depend and on whom we may depend. Here all that matters is what God does for us through Christ.

And here God does not stand before us as the exacting judge, but as one who gives and creates both the will and the fulfillment through his Spirit; for "the spirit giveth life."

And it is our office, just as it was Paul's office, to deliver this message. We will be content with that mission; for it is enough for us and for the whole world!

AMEN.

## THE WIDOW'S MITE

(*Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity*)

Grace be with us and peace from God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.



And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

— *Mark 12:41-44*



“Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart!” Probably we shall have to be told that again and again, and always with fresh emphasis. For we are naturally inclined to trust to appearances and, while appreciating the impulses and motives behind any human action, to judge that action by its result.

Where should we get to, otherwise? After all, it is facts that count in the end. We live in a world of material realities, and in this world the shilling is not merely *worth* more than the farthing; it *is* more. Anyone who tries to deny that fact will speedily be put right.

In living our lives it would be a piece of irresponsible folly on our part to leave the *terra firma* of reality. We must be content to know that there is a higher court of appeal, where



the verdict is determined not by the visible result nor by the measurable achievement but by standards which can never be recognized in the realm of hard facts.

When it comes to paying an account, the farthing with which we always associate the devoted and self-sacrificing love of the widow, who with this farthing gave away all that she had, is still only a farthing; and the shilling, however much it may bear the character of a grudging contribution, still pays according to its full minted value and weight. And so we may feel that this gospel story of the widow's mite is nothing more than an elevating tale, meant to remind us that behind this world of visible things and its harsh laws there is another world, where that which is secret is revealed and where the thoughts of the heart are weighed in the balance.

Such elevating tales are good and useful for us to hear. They help us to reflect and guard us against a superficiality which clings to what is visible only, and for that very reason has no roots from which to draw sustenance. Moreover, wherever we men work, wherever we produce and achieve results, the spirit behind our actions is surely not a matter of indifference. "If two men do the same thing, it is not the same thing," says a popular proverb, and that proverb is right.

A sense of responsibility, devotion and the will to make sacrifices are extremely important factors as far as our actions are concerned, and they are woven into the result of our labor just as much and just as truly as is any indifference, injustice or selfishness of which we have been guilty. It is a universal experience that ill-gotten gains do not prosper and that lightly won victories do not last. On the other hand,

it is just as certain that widows' mites, which have really meant a sacrifice to the giver, contribute more to the permanent value of a work than any sum which has been contributed from surplus wealth, but in which the donor has no inward part.

If these truths are convincingly brought home to our minds, as they are in this story of the widow's mite, the effect on us is probably beneficial and, in the true sense of the word, edifying. Our conscience is rendered more sensitive when we recognize how in an apparently unimportant and insignificant act there is room for great and genuine responsibility; and our joy in doing things is increased when we see that even a slight gift represents a high value when it is offered in the right spirit.

It remains only to ask what connection all these reflections are supposed to have with the gospel. This edifying philosophy is obviously associated neither with faith in God nor with the person of Jesus. It is, rather, the common property of mankind, found wherever a coarse and superficial materialism does not hold sway. We need not wonder, therefore, that a similar story concerning a woman who offers her entire possessions in the shape of two copper coins and is highly praised for so doing, is to be found among the old Indian stories of the saints, so that the question at once arose which was the copy and which was the original. Surely we may cheerfully ignore this question; for even if Jesus knew the Indian legend this story of the widow's mite retains its own characteristic importance because it occurs in the gospel, because it does not ask us how we would judge the action of this woman, but tells us how the living God judges it.

The treasury in the temple at Jerusalem which is referred to here was a very old affair, dating back many centuries to the time of King Joash and the priest Jehoiada, as we read in the Second Book of Kings. The contributions placed in it served to keep the temple in repair, for the ordinary and public funds were not sufficient for that purpose; and each person put into the treasury according to his inclination and his means.

The Jews were a pious nation and they were devoted to the temple as the dwelling-place of God in their midst. The treasury therefore knew of many a rich and opulent gift offered in joy, pride and gratitude, or even in sorrow, prayer and solemn promise. Jesus had no intention of blaming or rejecting this readiness to bring gifts to God. "And many that were rich cast in much"; that was fitting: "Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High!"

But now, quietly and inconspicuously, the extraordinary, the incomparable act takes place: the poor woman's two mites, her last possession and "all her living," join the silver coins. We respect this woman, for we feel that behind her action is a courage which we might well envy. Our text calls her a poor widow, and that probably means that she had more than loneliness to bear. And therefore her two mites weigh heavily. It is a hundredweight of love which she gives away, keeping nothing for herself. What must God's temple have meant to that poor woman in her misery to make her give it all she had!

It is a wonderfully confident faith, before which we stand marveling, which makes a human being actually dare to throw his cares entirely upon the Lord, feeling that "he will surely make all things right." Yes, what human happiness



and earthly hopes must have been destroyed in this woman, but what new strength God's help and goodness must have given her for her to be able to offer him all that she had! With her it became true that, "if I have but thee, I ask nothing of heaven or earth!"

We respect this woman, and we cannot adequately praise her unity of thought and action which is so incredibly unpretentious and self-evident and which quite clearly comes from God. Even if we had a desire to speak of "happy trust in God" and of "heroic piety," we feel that to do so would be to introduce a false note, that these are but insipid phrases after all. The Bible calls it "faith," and we shall have to abide by that word and guard against making it devoid of meaning.

Jesus did not use the word "faith" in the gospel which we have read; yet he who has ears can hear how the Lord calls the poor woman blessed because of her great faith. Yet at first glance her action has a different aspect: There lie the two small copper coins among all the rest of the money. A moment ago they were all the donor's wealth; now they are but a pitiful contribution, and when the offerings are next counted by the temple servitors these coins will make exactly a farthing and no more. Would it not be better to give the money back to the poor woman? Of what use is it here among contributions that run into thousands?

I may confess, dear brethren, that in these last two years many a widow's mite has passed through my hands, and again and again I have wondered whether it would not be better and more fitting to give back to the donor the money which could so ill be spared. After all, God looks upon the heart and in these matters, too, he takes the honest will for

the deed. But I have never returned such contributions, simply because this story passes an entirely different verdict: "This poor woman hath cast more in," says Jesus, "than all they which have cast into the treasury." This farthing not only means more than the rest of the gifts; it *is* more, because it has found favor in the sight of God!

The widow's mite plays a role similar to that of the ten righteous men for whose sake God let mercy take the place of justice. For the sake of the righteous farthing, offered in faith, God lets the unrighteous wealth serve to build his temple, so that his church may not fall to pieces but may rise again from the ruins.

At the present time the question of money plays a prominent part where our church is concerned. There are plenty of people who are inclined to think that it is the most important question of all. The pencil is already at work, and the financial departments which the state has set in authority over the church are proving to us in black and white that the church lives on the charity of the state, on the contribution of its millions and on the grants given to it by the state.

We can say little against these statements; when all is said and done, the Christian church lives in the world and it cannot get on without money. But we must let ourselves be told by this very gospel that in God's treasury the offering given in faith and grateful love is more than all riches. For the house of God can quite well be built among us without contributions from the state and without grants to the church, but it can never be built without that self-sacrificing and disinterested love which is faith turned into action.

We are gradually coming to honor God's treasury again, for it is becoming plainer from one month to another that

the church is falling into decay because the ordinary public resources are failing or are being directed into false channels. We must gratefully confess that the appeal to the Christian community is not dying unheard, and that today, too, we are thoroughly justified in saying, "Many that were rich cast in much." But that is not enough. We must also have faith in which thought and action are united, faith which knows itself to be entirely indebted to God and which therefore puts itself entirely into God's hands. For the true and proper gospel, the "good news" which comes to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, is this: If we bring our poverty to God, he gives us his riches in exchange; if we bring our sins to God, he gives us his righteousness in exchange; if we bring our sorrows to God, he gives us his peace in exchange. That is the moral of the story of the widow's mite, and our Lord Jesus Christ says, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them!"

AMEN.



## HARVEST THANKSGIVING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all! Amen.



When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.

And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?

Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?

Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. — *John 6:24-29*



The festival which our whole nation is today celebrating is not essentially a Christian festival. Rather is it a festival held wherever people are still conscious, or have again begun to realize, that humanity is dependent for its earthly existence on forces and powers which lie outside it and are not its to command.

And our generation has assuredly begun to have a new understanding of the fact that there are such powers and that all our achievements and our progress have not been able to make our lives really secure. Yes, we are probably not saying too much when we declare that in our day and age a wave of genuine and original piety is flowing over us —

if by piety we understand the deep-seated instinct which is conscious of dependent relationships that wish to be honored instead of being denied, that wish to be acknowledged instead of being brushed aside.

When we talk today of "native soil" and "nationality" a rediscovered reverence vibrates in our words. And when we hear of "work" and "bread" we know that these are not dry facts to be taken for granted, but fundamental elements of our existence which sustain us and without which we cannot live.

One often hears it said of this newly awakened piety that we have rediscovered the first article of faith, which deals with the creation, and that the reformation of the church in our time must start with this discovery. And does it not actually seem that all men and women of German blood and German soil might here find a supreme religious experience, shared by all, independent of narrow dogmas and doctrines, and beyond the bounds of the confessionalism that separates us from one another?

After all, fundamentally we all believe in the same God and in the same providence, and today, the day of thanksgiving for the harvest, it is evident that, for once at least, regardless of all differences of creed we glorify the same God and Father with one great, harmonious hymn of praise. And this communion of thanksgiving seems so natural that we are forced to wonder how the Christian church and its message come to follow such tortuous paths. Truly it is time to remind them that their own creed begins with believing in the Creator and with contemplating his creation.

Naturally, people will not agree so readily about the second and third articles of faith. But who knows? Once the be-

ginnings of a new piety and faith appear, we shall by fostering them probably proceed from knowledge to knowledge and from experience to experience. After all, Jesus himself again and again began with the physical miseries and wants of mankind in order to make the message of the sustaining and ministering kindness of the heavenly Father clear and impressive. And the result surely shows, does it not, how right this method of approach is. During Jesus' earthly life the people came in hundreds, nay, in thousands, and today they come in thousands, nay, in tens of thousands, when this message is to be heard: "Take no thought; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

When we look back at the road which our nation has traveled, when we recall the years of distress and the times when we have worried about our daily bread, we know that our difficulties are not yet at an end. But we also know that miracle after miracle has been worked upon us, and that it was not only five thousand who were fed beyond what they asked or understood!

What does it matter, then, how we picture God to ourselves or what our thoughts and opinions of him are? We are united in the happy, grateful confession, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us!" And what else can or dare the church preach today but those words which all are ready to hear: "Give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good!"

It is too bad that the church of Christ does not confine itself to this message, that it refuses to keep silent regarding the second and third articles of faith even today, but insists on proclaiming the Son of God as the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as the bringer of eternal life. Is then the Creator who gives us our life and maintains it nothing without the Re-



deemer who frees us from sin and death? Is he nothing without the Spirit which bestows eternal life upon us?

Surely, dear brethren, the meaning of today's gospel lesson is that the living God will not allow us to accept his gifts happily and peacefully, and to repay them with our praise and thanks. The Lord Jesus Christ fed the five thousand by a miracle and in so doing preached a dynamic sermon on the creative power and goodness of God; therefore the people wished to make him king. They wished to lay at his feet all the gratitude and honor within their power. "Thou shalt be our Lord!" If the first article of faith ever received new life, it was here; if the children of men ever wished to honor the giver because of the gift, they did so here.

And yet the giver cannot be found. He does not want to accept this gratitude and let himself be made the center of a great and imposing "harvest thanksgiving." Jesus was not there, neither were his disciples.

Neither the living God nor his church is present when we praise the heavenly Giver for earthly gifts. And if we think that we have taken a great step forward by again recognizing and acknowledging, both as individuals and as a nation, a divine providence over our earthly existence, by again becoming humble and grateful, we may well be on our guard and ask whether the living God, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, is with us or whether we are fondly dreaming of the God of the first article of faith, an idol which is of no more value than the golden calf.

Such ideas are much in vogue among us today. Every conceivable effort is being made to bring in the Lord Jesus Christ himself as a crown witness for such a naïvely happy "God-the-Father" religion, as though God's sole intention

had been to make us at home on this earth and in this life! Given such a religion, we should have a bread-Messiah: "Ye seek me because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." Then we should celebrate the harvest thanksgiving as the real festival of Christendom and of our nation and of all mankind: "We are all God's children; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Quite a nice religion — as long as we are well and have enough to eat! But the Lord Jesus Christ is not in it even though one may quote his words, and the living God is not in it either.

Underlying all the goodness of God the Creator which we experience is the question which can never be answered by arguments based on the first article of faith and which gives the lie to all the naïvely happy trust in God characteristic of such a substitute religion — the question, namely, of death and evanescence: "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone!"

What we do and what we leave undone, what we have or lack — all passes away. And yet we propose to talk seriously of God's goodness; we propose seriously to sing hymns of praise and gratitude at the harvest thanksgiving, just as though we lived by daily bread instead of dying by it.

Verily, it is not by chance that faith in the "dear Lord," in "providence," in the "*Herrgott*" lasts only as long as our own endurance and power of resistance. How could it do more when this so-called faith is after all nothing but the creation of our own mind and our own will, a creation that shares our transitoriness and our fatal destiny? Viewing our position from the standpoint of the first article, we cannot,

as creatures condemned to death in the midst of a creation condemned to death, honestly give praise and thanks without remembering that there is a death-knell at the end.

Therefore the "good news" begins only when, in this life-in-death, we are told of the promise of life, when we hear the message (even though at first we hear it only as God's call and command): "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life!" If we listen to that message and pay heed to it we are already poles apart from that worldly piety which pretends to be so happy, which is satisfied with bread and shuts its eyes to death. Then we know that the purpose of our life in this world does not consist solely in our doing our work to the best of our ability and, if the worst comes to the worst, living on for a little while in our posterity and in our German nation. Then we have to do, directly and personally, this very day but beyond the confines of this daily life, with the living God who gives us more than our daily bread, but who also wants more from us than a word of gratitude for the gifts which he as the Creator bestows upon us.

And if we are further told — as we are indeed told — that corresponding to God's call and commandment to "labor not for the meat that perisheth," and corresponding to the promise which opens up the prospect of a new world to us, there is a reality, because at one point God has actually broken through the ring of death which surrounds us, so that we can get out — if we are told that, how could we possibly act, even on one day in the year — today, for instance, on harvest thanksgiving day — as though the door to eternal life were not there, as though we had not been invited by Christ to



go through it, as though we were satisfied simply with believing in God as the Creator!

No, we have heard the message of redemption and cannot forget it. Nor do we wish to forget it, even though we are scoffed at as being antiquated and medieval when we still speak of death and sin and grace and eternal life. We know that when things become serious and when death stares us in the face, no "providence" or "dear Lord" or even the good old German "*Herrgott*" is of any avail. Then either we know the Lord Jesus Christ is present and follow him through the door which he has broken open — or we belong to the God of this world who then throws off his innocent disguise.

"Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you." May that be the word which will this very hour show us the way — the way to the third article of faith also; for this merging of our earthly life into eternal life is the work of the Holy Spirit. We must do more than hear the message of Christ as the Redeemer; we must believe in him — with a faith which is not merely the product of our own spirit and will, but with a faith such as the Scriptures counsel and as Luther describes — a faith which "the Holy Spirit must put in your heart and mine"! And so this faith requires that we accept also the message of sanctification, which bestows upon us, as the gift of the Holy Spirit, what God's grace worked in Christ.

So, dear friends, let us celebrate the harvest thanksgiving as a Christian church. Let us rejoice at the goodness of God the Creator and at his gifts, but without the secret terror that

tomorrow may be the end. Let us take these gifts as a sign and proof given us by God of his eternal goodness, which is revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ and which is and ever will be new every morning. "The Lord is mindful of us and blesses us." To him be honor and praise to all eternity!

AMEN.

## ONE LAST WORD\*

(June 27, 1937)

Israel has nevertheless God for his comfort! Grace be with us and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves and what ye intend to do as touching these men.

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

— Acts 5:34-42



It was an extremely critical moment in the life of the church. The apostles had defied the prohibition to speak which had been laid upon them. They had made the formal

\* The last sermon before Dr. Niemöller's arrest.



confession, "We must obey God rather than man." They had even taken up the offensive and accused their judges of murdering the Saviour sent by God, and had gone on to make known to them the promise of atonement and forgiveness of sins. "But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart and were minded to slay them."

At this moment Gamaliel rose to his feet, and we must recognize that it was thanks to his intervention alone that the apostles were freed and that it was possible for the community to go on living and working. What we feel about him is certainly therefore some sort of thankfulness. Undoubtedly he was a clever, upright and pious man, and we would wish for another such in these critical days of the church—for some intelligent man who would appeal for caution, an upright man who would appeal for honor, a pious man who would appeal for reverence to God. Perhaps in our time, too, such a voice would command a hearing. Perhaps then such frivolous moral judgments might be avoided as are illustrated in that press notice of last Friday, which had the heading, "Incitement to Disobedience."

The Prussian Council of Brethren will define their position about this notice; I will say just this one word, for I can do no other. When at the end of the notice it says, "Yes, another parson has escaped arrest by flight," no doubt the reference is to Pastor Asmussen, who has left Berlin by the advice of the Prussian Council. He has neither received a summons, nor has a warrant for his arrest been issued, and I have informed the minister of justice that it goes without saying that Pastor Asmussen holds himself in readiness in case a summons is issued. We have no more thought of using our own powers to escape the arm of the authorities than had the

apostles of old. But we are no more ready than they were to keep silence at man's behest when God commands us to speak. For it is and must remain the case that we must obey God rather than man.

The case today is the same as of old, and under these circumstances Gamaliel's counsel is a wise counsel, for it is unwise to create martyrs in a cause which one wishes to defeat. It is moreover good and proper counsel, for it is unrighteous to use the power of the sword to fight men's convictions. It is also a pious counsel, for it is impious to forestall the judgment of God which we do not yet know. The question is therefore: Would a new Gamaliel and a decree granting real freedom of faith and of conscience help us in the end? My dear brethren, let us not deceive ourselves! The supreme council accepted Gamaliel's advice as regards freedom of conscience and released the prisoners — though not without beating them and renewing the ban on their speech: "They charged the apostles not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." And in the very next chapter of the Acts the lightning flash of the first persecutions breaks out, those associated with the name of Stephen and directed by Saul, himself a pupil of Gamaliel.

It is clear that that tolerance for which a lance is now being broken can by no means be practiced as regards Christian faith and Christian confession. It is clear that one cannot in this case adopt a position of tentative neutrality and wait to see how things turn out before one makes a final decision. For all his cleverness, uprightness and piety, Gamaliel errs, for he imagines the case of Jesus of Nazareth is already settled, just as the other cases he cited, those of Theudas and Judas, were settled. But in the case of the apostles, a move-

ment was concerned the success of which could not yet be foretold.

As a matter of fact, the apostles preach exactly the opposite of what Gamaliel believes and acts upon. They preach him who was crucified and rose again. They preach that as regards themselves the decision of God has already been made, and that any worldly success or failure cannot change this decision; that the crucified Jesus is the living Christ and Lord of his church; that the decision whether he should be recognized or rejected cannot possibly be made dependent on what the future may bring forth.

He who fails to make his decision of faith for the Lord when the word of the cross is spoken to him, makes the decision against the Lord at the very moment when he thinks he has avoided committing himself. "He who is not with me is against me." Neutrality, therefore, is in practice impossible. It is the message of the cross which places before us the question: Yes or no; belief or unbelief; salvation or destruction. Thus all neutrality, even that which is well meant, turns one into an enemy, even if God may use one — since everything must work for the carrying out of his will upon earth. For us Christians, however, the counsel of Gamaliel, however well and honestly he may have meant it (and even if God used him, and still today uses him for the help of the community), nevertheless may represent a serious temptation that may prevail upon us to judge by success, to judge by appearances, and to base our faith on our experiences. This temptation has more power over us than perhaps we find easy to admit, for it is all too easy, in the suffering and in the hardship which we have to undergo, to draw the conclusion that after all God is *not* with us! That



after all the work for which we stand is *not* of God! It is no use therefore to trouble about it further — all is in vain!

Dear friends, let us not forget that God offers us salvation in the cross of his Son; that it is in the opportunity of hearing and believing this message that he offers us salvation; and that there is nothing else in heaven or on earth upon which we can rest or build our faith.

In this time of very special trial and struggle we must bear in mind that every attempt to gain security by some other means, every turning of our eyes after some other source of strength and support, works in a way exactly opposite to that which we intend; that in fact it will cause us shipwreck. The cross of Jesus — yes, that does indeed seem the end of all things and abandonment by God. Our eyes can see nothing else in it. If we hold with Gamaliel we come to this — *man's* counsel and *man's* activities! But the gospel says that it is just at this point that the love of God triumphs and reveals itself to the faithful. Here are God's counsel and God's work, and he who believes, all things are his! The suffering of our community, the shame which we have to bear when we take our stand beside the Crucified One — that is indeed a heavy burden and hardship. We feel the weight of it, and doubt finds its way into our soul. What of our faith? Jesus says: Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you and persecute you. . . . The ear of faith hears this promise, clings to it and finds joy and comfort.

My brothers and sisters, is it truly joy and comfort? We note today that neither we nor anyone else is helped by pious words mingled with a little Protestant enthusiasm and with the customary measure of healthy optimism. The pressure is growing. Anyone who has gone through the fiery ordeal

of the tempter in these last days — I think, for instance, how on Wednesday the secret police penetrated into the closed church of Friedrich Werder and arrested at the altar eight members of the Council of Brethren who were assembled there, and took them away; I think how yesterday at Saarbrücken six women and a trusted man of the Evangelical community were arrested because they had circulated an election leaflet of the Confessional Church at the direction of the Council of Brethren — I repeat, he who has indeed suffered all this cannot be far from uttering the words of the prophet. He also would like to say, “Now, O Lord, take away my life.” And anyone who, like myself last Friday evening, had no one beside him at the communion service except three young Gestapo men, who have to inform upon the activities of the community of Jesus, young men who certainly were once baptized in the name of Jesus and who certainly have pledged their faith to the Saviour, yet are now laying traps for his flock — one who has had such an experience cannot easily hide from himself the shame of the church. “Lord, have mercy!” And we recall how today the chancel of the Church of Anna remains empty because our pastor and brother Müller, with forty-seven other Christian brothers and sisters of our Evangelical church, has been taken into custody. And we think at the same time how the whole Christian community has been told that they too are by no means innocent, and how the first prosecutions are to take place today. Then, my dear friends, what next? Joy and comfort? Or despair and intimidation?

There is indeed no hope except to hold firmly to the Crucified One and to learn to say in simple and certain faith, “In the bottom of my heart thy name and cross alone shine forth

at all times and in all hours, and therefore I can be glad.” It may be long until we are truly glad, until like the apostles we are counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus’ name. The way will not be opened today or tomorrow. And that may be good, for it may teach us not to take impressions for belief. It may teach us how, in the heat of the struggle, to mark the word of our Lord and to continue to hear the message of the cross, the gospel of Jesus Christ — perhaps for the first time aright. It may show us how to teach it and to hear it and to preach it; for our faith lives in this word, and our joy flows from this word: “Lord, evermore give us this bread.”

AMEN.













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